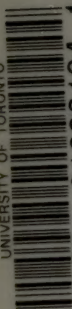


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GLASGOW AND GLASGOWMANNAH

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE Editors have much satisfaction in issuing this addition to the series of Guild Text-Books. They are aware of a desire in many quarters for some books of a simple and practical nature, and they believe that this exposition of St. Mark's Gospel is well fitted to supply the want. Its plain and pointed language will make it intelligible to any one who has received an ordinary education ; its methodical treatment of its subject, by means of carefully arranged lessons and well marked paragraphs, will facilitate the work both of teachers and pupils ; while its earnestness of tone and the practical wisdom with which it enforces moral and spiritual truth will render it a valuable instrument for the instruction of those who have left the Sunday School, but still desire guidance in the study of Holy Scripture.

A. H. CHARTERIS.

J. A. M'CLYMONT.

PREFACE

THESE lessons have been written, at the request of the Christian Life and Work Committee, for the use of Junior Bible Classes, and in particular as a help to young persons preparing for the Guild Examination on the contents of the Gospel according to St. Mark. The aim of the writer has been to produce a practical exposition such as any member of a Bible Class or Fellowship Section may read without difficulty. He has therefore endeavoured to keep clear of controversial and critical discussion, and refrained from loading his pages with foot-notes. Having somewhat exceeded the limits of space assigned him, he regrets that he cannot include at the beginning of each lesson the text of the passage with which it deals, and the previous perusal of which, readers will pardon him for reminding them, is essential to an intelligent apprehension of the lessons. For the same reason he has been obliged to leave out an introductory chapter that he proposed to insert. The latter omission, however, is of less consequence, seeing that what is commonly called

“Introduction” lies outside the proper scope of his subject. Those who desire to study its details in connection with St. Mark’s gospel (which is generally admitted to be the earliest of the four, and to bear out the tradition of the second century, that it embodies the testimony of St. Peter as recorded by St. Mark), the writer would refer to Chapter IV. of the Guild Text Book, entitled the “New Testament and its Writers.” He has to acknowledge with best thanks the kindness of friends, and especially of Dr. M’Clymont, the joint editor of the Text Book series, and the Rev. R. S. Kemp, B.D., in revising the proofs.

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“The Gospel according to St. Mark had its origin as follows :—When Peter had publicly preached the word at Rome, and by the Spirit had declared the Gospel, those who were present, being many in number, exhorted Mark, as having attended him for a long time, and remembering the things which he had said, to write down what had thus been spoken. Mark accordingly compiled this Gospel and gave it to those who had made request to him.”—CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, Book vi., ch. 14)

LESSONS ON THE GOSPEL OF ST. MARK

LESSON I

THE MESSENGER

Chap. i. 1-13

“THE beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The opening words of this gospel form its title. It is the glad tidings concerning Jesus Christ (*i.e.* The *Saviour* [Matt. i. 21] *Messiah* or *Anointed*), the Son of God. St. Mark does not record the human ancestry of Jesus, nor tell the story of His birth and childhood. For these we must go to St. Matthew and St. Luke. Neither does he like St. John proclaim Him the Eternal Word, the Creator and Giver of light and life. But, having stated plainly that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he goes on at once to relate the events of His active ministry; and the works of Jesus bear witness of Him that the Father hath sent Him.

The beginning of the gospel thus viewed is the mission of John the Baptist. In verses 2, 3 some read “in Isaiah the prophet” instead of “in the prophets,” but certainly both Malachi iii. 1, and Isaiah xl. 3 are here referred to.

In order to realise the importance of John’s mission, let us recall the circumstances of his time. The Jewish nation lay under the dominion of Rome, very much as India is now subject to Britain. To the great body of

the people, proud of their standing as God's chosen nation and more enlightened in some respects than their conquerors, this subjection to a heathen state was intolerable. One section of them, indeed—the Sadducees—seem to have acquiesced in it. They were the priestly aristocracy and comparatively few in number. As long as the foreign conquerors allowed them to hold the chief offices in the temple and enrich themselves with its revenues they were content. They had little patriotism and less religion. They believed in “no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit,” (Acts xxiii. 8).

The other great section—the Pharisees or separated ones, as the name signifies—were the true leaders of the people. They were numerous and zealous, proud of their nation's history and its divinely appointed institutions. Debarred by political jealousy from the priestly dignities, they found a field of influence in the synagogues or congregations of which there was at least one in every centre of population. There they became public teachers of the law and the prophets, and while they stimulated pride of race among the people by recalling their wonderful past, they insisted upon the strict observance of ceremonies, and held up to view the promises made by God's prophets of a glorious future for Israel. These promises centred in the coming of the Messiah, a heaven-sent deliverer who should set Israel free from foreign dominion, and raise her to a position of unprecedented power and splendour.

Four hundred years had passed since Malachi, the last of the old prophets, had foretold the coming of a *messenger* of God to prepare the way for the Messiah. Just as in the East when a great man journeyed, messengers were sent before to clear his route, widening paths, smoothing rough places, and loudly proclaiming their master's approach, so was the way of the Lord to be prepared. The nation waited in expectancy, and still the messenger tarried.

Unfortunately the Jews did not understand that their deepest need was not political freedom but deliverance

from spiritual deadness. With all their attachment to ceremonial worship they were in bondage to formalism. The way of the Lord to their hearts was blocked by pride, error, and prejudice. And it could not be well with them till those obstacles were removed. But now the hour had come ; and in John the Baptist, "a man sent from God," the long promised messenger arrived to teach the Jews their true necessities and prepare them for the Saviour who should supply these. Here St. Mark sets before us :—

1. **John's Personality**, *v.* 6.—Although the son of the priest Zacharias (Luke i.), and therefore probably well educated, John had spent much of his early manhood "in the wilderness"—a wild region between the central heights of Judæa and the Jordan. Here he lived the severe life of a religious ascetic. His clothing was a rough tunic of camel's hair, girded with a leathern strap instead of the rich sash so common in the East ; his food, locusts—the insect, not a plant—and wild honey, the most frugal fare those regions produced ; his character stern and enthusiastic. Like our John Knox he never feared the face of man. He had pondered the hapless state of his nation, its worldliness, its formal worship and deadness of soul, until his spirit burned within him, and when the time arrived John was ready to bear his testimony.

2. **John's Message**. — He preached (*a*) *REPENTANCE*, *i.e.* that all men had sinned and required a change of life, *v.* 4.

b. *REMISSION OF SINS*, *i.e.* that every penitent was assured of pardon, *v.* 4.

c. *BAPTISM IN TOKEN OF FORGIVENESS AND CLEANSING*, *v.* 4. It was not Christian baptism, for it could not admit into the Church, nor was it administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Neither was it identical with the ceremonial washings prescribed under the law of Moses (Lev. xiv. 8). The baptism of John signified, on the penitent's part, a return from evil ways and a longing for divine mercy and grace. On

God's part it taught that on every true penitent divine mercy and cleansing grace are bestowed.

d. THE COMING OF "ONE MIGHTIER THAN I," vv. 7, 8.—John's humility was as remarkable as his courage : to undo the "shoe latchet" was the office of a slave. The baptism "with water" was a figure of the mighty baptism "with the Holy Ghost" that "He who should come after" would bestow.

3. John's Success.—The effect of his ministry was to awaken great religious interest (*vv. 5*). Men of all ranks and conditions repaired in crowds to the banks of Jordan—probably at a spot near Jericho—and on hearing the intrepid preacher proclaim God's rule of righteousness, conscience smote them, they confessed their sins and were baptised. Thus did the Forerunner make straight the paths of the Lord.

4. John's Baptism of Jesus, vv. 9-11.—For nearly thirty years Jesus had dwelt in humble obscurity at Nazareth known as "the carpenter, the son of Mary," (*Mark vi. 3*) ; also as "Joseph's son" (*Luke iv. 22*). Those blameless years of unrecorded duty (the silence broken only by the visit to Jerusalem, described in *Luke (ii. 40-52)*), are full of instruction, especially for the young. Few are called to follow Jesus in work of public prominence. All can follow Him in dutiful conduct at home, and when God desires them to fill a larger field of service His Providence will show it.

But now Jesus had reached the age of thirty years, when it was usual for a Jewish minister of religion to enter upon office (*Num. iv. 3*). No doubt the fame of John the Baptist reached Nazareth, and Jesus recognised in him the sign that His own time had come to begin the ministry to which He was appointed. As the first step He came to the Jordan and was baptised by John.

Why did the Holy One undergo this rite ordained for sinners?

a. To fulfil all righteousness. He became man in everything except in actual sinfulness. Although no transgressor "He was numbered with the transgressors"

(Isa. liii. 12). Although no penitent He was numbered with the penitents.

b. In order to dedicate Himself once more to God before He began His public ministry, and so doing to receive the spirit "without measure" (John iii. 34).

And the dedication was acknowledged (*v.* 10). We note here for the first time the word "straightway" that occurs many times in this gospel. Amid differences of detail the gospel writers agree in relating how the heavens were "rent asunder," and the consecration of Himself by Jesus received the Father's approval and was accompanied by the Spirit's power. At Jordan we thus see the three persons of the Godhead revealed together. The Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove is significant of His gentleness and the message of peace and salvation He had come to proclaim.

5. The Temptation, *vv.* 12, 13.—The consecration of Jesus was followed by temptation. The Holy Spirit now constrained Him to go where He might make proof of His new power in an encounter with the spirit of evil. The scene of the temptation is believed to be a wild region to the north-west of Jericho. "With the wild beasts" (*v.* 13) implies no bodily danger, but only an utter want of human companionship. "Forty days" is the period already consecrated by Moses the Lawgiver in a holy fast on Mount Sinai (Ex. xxxiv. 28), and by Elijah the prophet in his wondrous journey to Horeb, the mount of God, sustained by Divine power, after partaking of miraculous food (1 Kings xix. 8). Now He, in whom the Law and the Prophets found fulfilment, underwent the same experience of self-denying solitude in preparation for the great work before Him.

St. Matthew and St. Luke describe the final crisis of the temptation in detail. Here it is enough to observe—

a. Jesus was tempted in His humanity. "God cannot be tempted with evil" (James i. 13).

b. He was tempted as our representative, the "Son of Man," "the last Adam" (1 Cor. xv. 45).

c. There is no need to imagine that the tempter assumed a visible form. The struggle was spiritual. The Spirit of God and the spirit of evil strove for the mastery in the heart of Jesus.

d. Jesus repelled the temptations by means of the sword of the Spirit—the word of God—and through the grace freely offered to us all. The second Adam stood firm where the first Adam fell. As we are by inheritance sharers in the disaster, so are we called to be by faith sharers in the victory. Henceforward for all who trust in Jesus the Evil Spirit is a beaten foe. “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. ii. 18).

LESSON II

IN GALILEE—THE FIRST DISCIPLES CALLED—A SABBATH AT CAPERNAUM

Chap. i. 14-34

BETWEEN the events recorded in the 13th verse and those beginning with the 14th there is an interval of about fifteen months, viz., January, 27 A.D.—May, 28 A.D. It includes the occurrences related in John i. 19-iv. 54.

St. Mark thus passes over the first year of the public life of Jesus, that which has been well named “the year of obscurity,” and brings us at once to the second year, known as “the year of popularity.”

It began with a sad incident—the imprisonment of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas, king of Galilee, in the lonely fortress of Machærus, beyond Jordan. The cause of this step and its consequences fall to be considered in chap. vi. The great Forerunner’s work was well nigh done, and the torch of truth, dropping from his hand, Jesus now caught up and held aloft in brighter, fuller

glow. At this time (early summer of 28 A.D.) Jesus came into Galilee, the most northerly of the three provinces—Judea, Samaria, and Galilee—into which Palestine was then divided. It was also the most populous and prosperous. A busy region—to be compared on a small scale to Lancashire or Lanarkshire—noted for its varied industries, *e.g.* agriculture, olive rearing, oil manufacturing, linen weaving, wool spinning, and, to a reader of the Gospels most interesting of all, its fisheries—the sea of Galilee, a fresh-water lake some 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles in length by 6 miles broad, abounding in several kinds of fish.

The inhabitants were hardy, intelligent, and blunt of speech. Living at a distance from Jerusalem and near the Gentiles, they were the less subject to the narrowing influence of the scribes and the temple officials, and therefore the more likely to hearken to new instruction.

To this community Jesus came preaching (*v.* 15). His voice confirmed the Baptist's message, and was an advance upon it. The burden of his testimony was:—(1) The time fulfilled and the kingdom of God at hand, *i.e.* the revelation of divine power and love in the long-promised Messiah was about to take place. (2) A call to repent and believe in the gospel or glad tidings of a Deliverer. No preaching to sinful men is adequate without a call to penitence and faith; and neither of these suffices without the other.

The Call of Four Fishermen, *vv.* 16-20.—Soon after His arrival in Galilee our Lord suffered violent rejection from the men of Nazareth, the home of His childhood (Luke iv. 16-31). He then came into Capernaum on the lake, henceforth known as "His own city." As He watched the fishermen plying their craft He recognised amongst them four friends, *viz.*, Andrew and Simon, the sons of Jonas, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and these He called away from their occupation to be the constant companions of His ministry. In regard to this call observe:—

I. ITS REASONABLENESS.—Those fishermen were not

strangers, but intimate friends of Jesus. Certainly two of them, and probably all four, had more than a year before become disciples, and had since then been much in His company (John i. 37, ii. 2). They were now called to closer fellowship in preparation for a still higher position.

2. *THE MEN'S CHARACTER*.—Not learned scribes, or priests, but plain men trained to habits of industry and hardy endurance. All four were busy in their lawful calling, and that a suggestive one for future “fishers of men.”

In like manner Moses and David when keeping sheep were called to shepherd God's people Israel (Exodus iii. 1, 10; 1 Samuel xvi. 11). Gideon, thrashing wheat, was called to break up the host of Midian (Judges vi. 11).

3. *THE TERMS OF THE CALL*, v. 18.—Not “go and be fishers of men,” but “come ye after me and I will make you to become.” No man can capture souls for Christ until Christ has captured him, and fitted him for the work (Phil. iii. 12-14). But the captive must be willing. Christ compels no man to follow Him.

4. *THE READY RESPONSE*—They did not realise the great position in store for them. No tempting picture of earthly honour and renown was held up to stir ambition. But, when the Lord's call was heard, one course alone seemed open, and “straightway” they followed.

Sabbath Works of Mercy, 21-34.—Jesus now entered Capernaum. It was a large town on the western shore of the lake, the precise site now unknown, the seat of a garrison and custom house; also the present home of Andrew and Simon, and probably of other disciples; henceforth to be the centre of the Lord's ministry in Galilee, and the scene of many miracles.

And straightway on the Sabbath day—extending according to our reckoning from Friday at sunset till the same hour on Saturday—Jesus entered into the Synagogue or Jewish place of worship as was His custom. The services were held on the Sabbath, often at noon, and consisted of prayers, singing of psalms, and the reading of

the law and the prophets, regular portions of which were appointed for each service. It was usual for the presiding ruler or elder to invite any person present, whom he believed capable of edifying the meeting, to take part, which accounts for our Lord's teaching on this and other occasions (cf. Acts xiii. 15). The gospel preachers did not despise the old ways of worship. And they showed the most genuine respect by using them as a foundation for new and larger views of truth.

On this occasion He spake so that all were astonished at His doctrine. Why? "He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes" (*v.* 22).

The scribes or professional expounders of the law were dry and unspiritual. The authority they claimed was derived from the old commentaries called "the tradition of the elders," much of whose teaching was useless and trifling, quite unfit to guide the conscience or satisfy the soul. Their teaching consisted mainly of quotations. Jesus spake with His own direct authority. He did not even declare like the prophets, "Thus saith the Lord," but rather, "Verily I say unto you," "whosoever keepeth these sayings of mine and doeth them I will liken him unto a wise man" (*Math.* vii. 24). Everywhere Jesus speaks as the Son of God. "The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life" (*John* vi. 3).

The hour of worship over, we see our Lord employ the Sabbath day in works of mercy and compassion. There is no better way of spending Sabbath hours after divine service than in relieving the distressed. In this work Jesus used the powers of miracle. We can employ such powers as we possess. The principle is the same whatever be the measure of ability. Every one can do something to hallow the Sabbath by works of love and mercy, and thereby follow in the Master's footsteps. Here we have works of compassion: 1. In the Synagogue. 2. In the home. 3. In the highways.

1. *IN THE SYNAGOGUE*, *vv.* 23-28.—We cannot understand the affliction of the demoniacs, several times mentioned in the gospel. It was more than epilepsy or

insanity. It was not always, if ever, the result of bad conduct, for sometimes children were afflicted (ix. 22). It was a case of oppression, rather than of seduction. In this case we see the usurping evil spirit making use of the man's faculties to express his own fear and hatred. In his misery the poor man had come to church, perhaps from old habit. But the words and holy presence of Jesus rouse the demon to anguish and despair. "Let us alone" is literally "Ah, ah," uttered in acute torment. Already God the Father and God the Holy Ghost had borne testimony to Jesus (vv. 10, 11). And now the powers of evil, recognising their conqueror and foe, cry out, "What have we to do with Thee?" lit. "What is there common to us and to Thee?" Verily nothing in one sense. The prince of this world found nothing in Him (John xiv. 30). But Jesus had something to do with them. The Seed of the woman had come to bruise the head of the serpent; and the evil spirit's terror showed that he knew it. Men may be dull and blind and stupid as to the power and mission of Jesus. Not so the evil spirits. Here the demon's testimony is met with a stern command to keep silence, lit. "Be muzzled and come out of him," (v. 25). With great reluctance the command is obeyed. Jesus made the serpent drop his prey, but not without hurting; even as in Himself the heel was bruised that crushed the serpent's head. The congregation wondered at the "new doctrine." Had they but apprehended that the Messiah was amongst them, Himself very God, there would have been less amazement and more adoration. The deed would have seemed but natural for such an One to do.

2. *IN THE FISHERMAN'S HOME*, vv. 29-31.—In this striking little incident we see Jesus lift a burden from the heart and home of His friend Simon. St. Luke, the physician, styles this illness "a great fever" (Luke iv. 38). Very likely a sudden attack, for neither Andrew nor Simon seem to have mentioned it to Jesus before they brought Him home with them. But once aware of it, "anon they tell Him of her" (v. 30). They have just

seen His power to heal and they know His willingness to help. Observe the minute detail with which St. Mark narrates the healing (*v.* 30). He "came." "He took her by the hand." He "lifted her up." The grace and kindly sympathy of the act are as evident as its power. Half the virtue of practical beneficence lies in the manner of conferring the boon. Mark also the completeness of the cure. "Immediately the fever left her"; and no feebleness or prostration remained. Promptly she arose and busied herself with hospitable cares. In Christ's healing of a sinful soul the evil does not always depart so quickly; but the renewal of spiritual health may be proved by the amount of zeal for service.

3. *ON THE HIGHWAY, vv. 32-34.*—In the cool of the evening a crowd collected round the door of the fisherman's cottage. We note St. Mark's pithy phrase, "all the city was gathered together." In that crowd there were no doubt some idle gazers, but the greater number came aware of infirmities in themselves or their loved ones, and believing in the Lord's power to heal. Mark the patience and compassion of Jesus. At the close of that arduous Sabbath day He is beset by that sick and demon-haunted crowd, yet no word of irritation escapes Him. He healed them, one by one (see Luke iv. 40), no doubt labouring till late at night. And He is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. We can never wear out our welcome with Christ. According to His infinite wisdom and loving-kindness He rewards the faith of every sufferer who seeks Him, far above all that we can ask or think.

LESSON III

SOLITARY PRAYER—MISSION JOURNEY IN GALILEE—
CLEANSING OF A LEPER

Chap. i. 35-45

Jesus at Prayer, v. 35.—After the busy Sabbath day considered in last lesson, Jesus sought a brief season of repose. But for Him the most needful rest was not for the body but for the soul; not sleep but prayer. So now we see Him cut short His slumbers and go forth, “a great while before day,” to some solitary spot near Capernaum; there in undisturbed communion with the Father to refresh His wearied energies for further service. Private prayer was the habit of His life. Among the hills of Galilee and throughout Judæa lies many a spot of holy ground thrice consecrated though now unknown, for there Christ prayed in secret.

It is not for us, His weak, sinful followers, to neglect private prayer. We commend the young person who takes trouble and sacrifices ease for the sake of self-culture. But the highest form of self-culture is the culture of the soul, the pursuit of fellowship with God; and for that, regular private prayer is a necessity. No trouble should be grudged to secure it.

Journey in Galilee, vv. 36-39.—For the first time in this narrative we see Simon take the lead of his comrades. With eager steps the four disciples sought out their Master in His retirement with the tidings: “All men are seeking Thee” (v. 37). No doubt a crowd had again surrounded the fisherman’s house, anxious to see and hear more wonders. But the Master’s course had been too well considered for a little popular sensation to divert Him from it. With calm majesty He gave the disciples to understand that Capernaum had for the present received its message. Other towns—*i.e.* country

towns as distinct from cities—must now share the privilege: “For therefore came I forth” (*v.* 38; John xvi. 28). The mission of Jesus for the present lay not in nursing popular excitement and seeking “results” at Capernaum, but in sowing the good seed broadcast. So, for the next few weeks we see Him traverse the fair land of Galilee “preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils,” (*v.* 39). Dalmanutha, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Magdala, with many a scattered village, heard the love of God proclaimed as never before, and in works of power and mercy “beheld the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John i. 14).

A Leper cleansed, *vv.* 40-45.—In the course of His mission journey in Galilee there came to Jesus a leper. The precise scene of this miracle is not recorded. As we reflect upon it we note

1. *THE LEPER'S MISERY.*—He was the victim of a fell disease incurable by human skill, though sometimes removed by the mercy of God (Lev. xiii. 6, Numb. xii. 14).

There is some doubt how far the leprosy mentioned in Scripture is identical with the disease of that name found in the East to-day. No doubt there were various forms of it. In some cases, though loathsome, it was not fatal, and even permitted an active life, *e.g.* Naaman the Syrian general was a leper (2 Kings v. 1).

But in its worst types leprosy poisoned the whole system, so that limbs and features gradually decayed and dropped off. The Jews called it the “finger of God,” and “the stroke,” from its mysterious origin and deadly nature. The chief terror it bore for them, however, lay in the conditions attached to it by law. The leper was excluded from the house of God, and from the comforts of home and friends when in sore need of them. He dwelt alone, or in leper villages, among wretched sufferers like himself. With head bare, lips covered, and clothes rent, he had to stand apart and warn off approaching wayfarers with the doleful cry, “Unclean, unclean” (Lev. xiii. 44-46).

Why this frightful treatment of a suffering fellow creature? Not for sanitary reasons only, if at all. In Scripture leprosy is not described as contagious. The Jewish priests examined lepers closely without hurt (see Lev. xiv). It was because the law viewed leprosy as a symbol of sin, and its victims as under a Divine curse. A hard case for innocent sufferers, to be accounted for only by the stern spirit of those times. So this poor man of Galilee lived "as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed" (Num. xii. 12), his one prospect of relief—the grave. The force of the symbol is obvious. Sin like leprosy corrupts, disfigures, and destroys the life. It brings men under a curse. It estranges a man from God and from his brother man. It is incurable except by Divine mercy and grace.

2. *THE LEPER'S FAITH*, v. 40.—The man was alive to his own condition. He was also convinced of the Lord's power to cleanse him. As to the Lord's will, he resolved to venture. His longing finds relief in entreaty. There is not much of the spiritual element here. No reference to Jesus as the Messiah. But he knows that mercy has been shown to other sufferers, and he makes his appeal in hope that the kind heart of Jesus will not deny him the boon. His faith was sound, so far as it went. In spiritual leprosy the worst sufferers are blind to their own state, and in love with the evil that is destroying them. The first step towards deliverance is to acknowledge our case to be hopeless so far as our own efforts will avail. The next is a conviction of the Saviour's all-sufficiency, "Thou canst." We have not this leper's excuse for saying "If thou wilt." For nearly nineteen centuries the gracious "Come unto me all ye that labour" has been calling sinful souls to liberty and peace. The Cross of Calvary has proclaimed that Jesus is able and willing to save unto the uttermost.

3. *THE LEPER'S REWARD*, vv. 41, 42.—This man was a bruised reed, not to be broken (Isaiah xlii. 3).

Instead of resenting the approach of the stricken Jew, Jesus is filled with compassion for the suffering man. (Note the movement of kindly sympathy and the touch

and word of power.) By law none but a priest could touch a leper without ceremonial pollution. But now, alike in the leper's approach and the Lord's reception of him, the law is superseded by something higher. Jesus is "the Lord of the law." The touch of love does not bring contamination. By His own direct authority He bids the leper be clean, and he is obeyed. Such power belongs to God alone. Here the spiritual parallel is plain. A man's sins may have degraded him so that he is cut off from church fellowship and home and friends. But they cannot exclude him from the compassion and power of Jesus. Let the veriest outcast only come to Him in penitence and faith, and at once the deadly malady is checked, and in time the lost self-respect and fellowship will return.

4. *A WAYWARD DISCIPLE, III. 43-45.*—On the newly cleansed leper the Lord laid a "strait" or stringent command. It was twofold. First, to hold his peace. It was no time to make himself a gazing-stock, nor would the Gospel mission be helped by further excitement. Second, to go to the priest, offer the needful sacrifices (Lev. xiv. 1-32), and receive their testimony that his cure was real. This would set him right with his own countrymen, and forestall much of the opposition of the Master's enemies. But the man disobeyed both commands, and so hurt himself and hindered the Lord's work. Too often still do wilful disciples by ill-advised clamour injure the cause of Christ. The first and last proof of genuine gratitude is loyal obedience.

LESSON IV

THE PARALYTIC CURED IN BODY AND SOUL

Chap. ii. 1-12

THE Lord's journey over, after a little interval He came "again" to Capernaum, the second visit mentioned by St. Mark. (Cf. i. 21.) Probably "the house" to which He now betook Himself was the humble abode of Simon and Andrew. There, on the news of His arrival spreading, He "straightway" found Himself besieged by an expectant crowd. We can imagine the fisherman's cottage filled to overflowing; the little inner court, on which the living rooms opened, in eastern fashion, thronged; the corridor blocked, and a large gathering round the street door eager to see and hear this new prophet. How did He receive them? "preached the word" (*v.* 2). No doubt He announced to them His mission as he had done at Nazareth (Luke iv. 21).

Whatever those people desired or expected Jesus knew their chief *need*, and set Himself to supply it.

And now occurred the striking incident of this passage.

1. Steadfast faith in action, *vv.* 3, 4.—Down the street towards Simon the fisherman's house come four men carrying a sick friend on a pallet or padded quilt. The patient is paralysed and helpless. He is also in distress of mind, conscience-stricken and penitent. All five are firm believers in the power and compassion of Jesus, and have resolved to reach Him in one way or another. But attempts to penetrate the crowd are vain. What then? Must they return baffled? A weaker faith would have done so, but those men are in earnest. Turning from the blocked doorway the four bearers ascend by some outside stair or other means of access to the flat roof of the house, a low one-story building roofed with stone slabs covered with earth. This roof they

break through, and having made a sufficient aperture they lower the pallet and its occupant to the feet of the Master. The indomitable faith of the four friends is proved by this practical form of appeal; the sick man's trust by submitting to the discomfort and risk such an experience involved. Intercessory faith thus working by love, combined with a sense of helplessness and personal trust, have the assurance of blessing. They cannot fail. In the same spirit we can bring our friends to Jesus in steadfast prayer and effort, undaunted by obstacles.

2. **The Reward of Faith**, *v.* 5.—Jesus went straight to the heart of the man's need. "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." The palsy or paralysis may have been caused by bad conduct. We do not know. At any rate those tender words of Jesus reveal in the sufferer conviction of sin, penitence, and faith. For no soul without these can be forgiven. And once the spiritual blessing was realised, he would have assurance that bodily healing would follow.

Jesus Christ confers many benefits on mankind, such as light, liberty, progress, civilisation, social benevolence. All are to be found wherever Christianity prevails. But the most precious of all benefits is peace with God through pardon. Without this one thing needful other blessings are short-lived and vain.

3. **The demeanour of the Scribes**, *vv.* 6, 7.—Those persons were professional teachers of the law. They were called scribes, or writers, because they had been the first to make copies of the Scriptures to be read in the synagogues. They generally belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and were, with rare exceptions, narrow-minded and jealous of their influence with the people. On this occasion several had come down as deputies from Jerusalem and other distant places, sent to watch the new teacher of Galilee, and, if possible, find occasion for a charge of error against Him. To their dry, unspiritual minds the compassion and wisdom and gracious speech of Jesus were of no account. "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" sounded not only as heresy but

as blasphemy, profane assumption of a divine prerogative. So they sat there saying nothing, but condemning Him in their hearts. How stood the case? The Scribes were right in the general principle—Who can forgive sins but God only? But they fell into the error of ascribing blasphemy to Jesus, because prejudice blinded them to His true character.

4. **Our Lord's reply.**—He knew what was in man (John ii. 25). Here He perceived in the faces of the Scribes their inward antagonism, and remonstrated with them (v. 8). He then vindicated His own action (v. 9). It was as easy for Him to say "Arise and walk" as to say "Thy sins be forgiven thee." From His lips both commands are effectual. In the authority committed to Him as "Son of Man," the representative head of the human race, and also as Son of God, He had just blessed that penitent with the grace of pardon, both declared and conferred. If the soul of the paralytic could have been exposed to view there would have been no room for doubt on the point. But as such evidence was impossible, the Lord silenced the gainsayers by a visible testimony. Turning to the helpless man He commanded him, saying, "Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way into thine house," and He was obeyed. The invisible cure is manifested by the visible, the spiritual by the material.

The miracle is also a parable. Just as leprosy typified the pollution of sin, so does the palsy show forth the powerlessness of the sinner. And He who was able to cleanse is also able to give strength.

This miracle may appear to be an answer to the hostile scribes. It is really the reward of faith, and the answer to the scribes forms but an incident in the bestowal of it.

The faith of the paralytic and his friends we have seen, (1) in the persistent efforts of the latter with the consent of the former (v. 4); (2) in the fact of the penitent receiving pardon; and (3) in the prompt obedience to the command "Arise." In making the effort to obey the

paralytic received the needful strength. So is it with all spiritual power. To every soul is committed the choice of taking the attitude either of obedience or of resistance to the Lord's call. To resist is to abide in death. To obey is to receive grace and power, so that the renewed soul undertakes and achieves enterprises that once seemed quite beyond him. The man till now so helpless went forth through the crowd carrying his bed. He bore also a lightened conscience and a glad heart. No sort of doubt remained as to the Lord's power to heal. How the Scribes behaved here matters little. Their after conduct shows that all they saw and heard was but a savour of death unto death.

The common people "were all amazed, and glorified God," (*v.* 12). No doubt with many of them the impression was shortlived. We may hope that some were encouraged in after days to become disciples.

If we are faithful to our Master we too shall bear about with us the tokens that he is able to save and renew and strengthen. And we shall thus draw others to make proof of Him for themselves. The Son of Man hath still power on earth to forgive sins, and He says to helpless souls that look to Him in faith, "Arise and walk."

LESSON V

THE CALL OF LEVI—JESUS THE HEALER—THE RULE OF FAST AND FESTIVAL

Chap. ii. *vv.* 13-22

THE incident of last lesson occurred in a house in Capernaum. After the exhausting time spent in that crowded dwelling, Jesus went forth again from the city to the shore of the lake to obtain a little leisure and fresh air. But for Him there was no rest. The people,

excited by the wonder lately witnessed, resorted (lit. "kept resorting") to Him, and He "kept teaching" them. The words suggest no set address, but a continual asking and answering of questions.

The Call of Levi, *v.* 14.—Up to this time the personal companions of Jesus were four in number, the sons of Jonas and the sons of Zebedee. Now He adds a fifth, also a citizen of Capernaum, called from his daily business to follow the Lord. "Levi the son of Alphæus" is believed to be identical with "a man named Matthew" (Matt. ix. 9). It was customary for a Jew to adopt a new name when making an important new departure in life, *e.g.* Simon was named Peter; Saul of Tarsus, Paul.

Levi was a Publican or Tax-gatherer; that is, a Jew employed in levying tribute from his fellow-countrymen on behalf of their heathen conquerors at Rome. The right to collect taxes in a province such as Galilee was rented from Government by rich Romans of high rank, who sub-let it to business agents, and these in their turn employed local officers, commonly known as publicans, to collect the money. The burden of supporting this system of threefold profits all fell on the unfortunate taxpayer. The Jewish publicans as a class were hated even more than their Roman employers because the extortion they practised was at the cost of their own nation.

No man of high character would undertake the office. It is reasonable to suppose that Levi had already met with Jesus, and been deeply impressed by His teaching. Jesus also knew Levi, and in spite of his present occupation perceived in him the making of a good disciple. Doubtless for some time Levi had felt a growing distaste for his sordid business. Since he had come to know Jesus the injustice and greed and baseness of it all had struck him as never before. Yet it was his bread, a profitable pursuit not to be highly relinquished. *But now the hour of decision had arrived.* As Levi sat at the "receipt of custom," or toll-booth, at one of the entrances to Capernaum, levying an impost on the goods

of passing traders, he saw the Lord approach, and presently his whole being was thrilled by the summons "Follow Me." At once the duties of the toll-booth were handed to some subordinate, and the publican became a disciple.

The influence of Jesus had done its work. The Spirit of God had vanquished the spirit of Mammon. Levi parted with a lucrative post. He gained peace of conscience, a satisfied heart, and glory, honour, and immortality.

Sometimes we are perplexed regarding the Christian lawfulness of some pursuit we follow in business or in recreation. There are arguments for and against it. It is profitable on the whole and pleasant, and yet we are not satisfied. In such a case it is a good course to cease from argument for a little and cultivate with renewed diligence the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Be diligent in prayer, in studying the Word, and in frequenting the company of good Christians.

In the light of that closer fellowship see how the doubtful matter appears. If more doubtful than ever there is a strong presumption that Christ calls us to relinquish it. Having sought His guidance let us now seek His grace to respond by a prompt and willing sacrifice.

Levi's Feast, v. 15.—Very soon Levi showed the strength of his new attachment. In his enthusiasm he made a feast, and invited his friends the tax-gatherers and others of as bad repute to meet with Jesus, no doubt in the hope that they might be led to share his present blessing and joy.¹ That is the true gospel spirit. Thus Andrew brought Simon to Jesus; Philip brought Nathanael (John i. 41, 42, 45, 46). The Samaritan woman brought her fellow townsmen (John iv. 29). And so the Lord desires His truth and influence to spread to "every creature" (xvi. 15).

¹ The term "sinners" is here used in a colloquial sense. It cannot be taken literally, for all men are sinners. It means persons of no pretensions to religious or moral character.

The Scribes' Criticism, v. 16.—Certain Scribes and Pharisees had followed Jesus into the house of Levi during the feast. That would not have been reckoned an intrusion, for it was the easy custom of the country and time. But they next took it upon them to find fault with the presence of Jesus there. Not venturing to address Himself, they speak at Him to His disciples. (The question in v. 16 is properly an exclamation.) Much as they disliked Jesus, they could not now refuse Him the position of a recognised teacher of religion. In their eyes the proper attitude of such an one towards publicans and sinners was to stand aloof and condemn. And yet here was this prophet of Nazareth sitting at meat with them. Then, as now, a social meal was a sacrament of friendly fellowship.

The Lord's reply, v. 17.—There is a touch of irony here. The Scribes were really very far from whole, yet the Lord takes them at their own estimate, and shows how even on that footing His present action was justified.

He was a healer, and where therefore should He be found but amongst the sick? If the Scribes were as righteous as they themselves supposed, they did not need Him. But beyond the Lord's irony there was a great truth. He came to call a world of sinners to repent, believe and live. It was part of the scribes' disease that they could not perceive their need of healing, and therefore missed the opportunity to be healed. We are also reminded that there are two forms of fellowship between the good and the bad. First, on the footing of associates, which is dangerous. The good are so liable to be contaminated. Second, on the footing of healer and sufferer, of helper and helped. And that is the footing that Jesus held and that He bids His servants maintain in their measure.

The attitude of the Scribes—neither that of associate nor that of healer, but of critic and judge—is not one for sinful man to hold towards his brother.

The Bridegroom and His Friends, vv. 18-20.—Not only did the Scribes object to the company in which

they found Jesus, but also to the occasion. Levi in the joy of his new departure had made a feast. But it would seem that on that day the stricter of the Pharisees along with the followers of John the Baptist were holding one of their frequent fasts.¹ And the question in verse 18 does not so much seek information as find fault with the feast as betokening an unworthy laxity in men who professed religion.

The Lord's reply lays down a broad principle (*v.* 19). There is a time to feast and a time to fast. Neither fast nor feast has any merit in itself. To feast is the token of gladness; to fast, the natural expression of sorrow. It might be well for the disciples of John to fast, since they mourned their great leader now laid in prison. For the followers of Jesus to fast would be, at the time, unnatural and improper. John the Baptist had likened Him to a bridegroom whose presence marks an occasion of joy. The disciples were now rejoicing in His daily fellowship; therefore they did right to feast. Soon the bridegroom would be taken from them by a tragic death, and then, in their desolation and sorrow, they too would fast.² Meanwhile let fast and festival each express its own condition, and let no attempt be made to force the one into the place of the other.

Jesus goes on to apply a similar rule to the whole ceremonial of the Law of Moses, in its relation to the gospel (*vv.* 21, 22). To attempt to attach the gospel of God's love towards all men to the traditions and observances of the Jewish Scribes would be disastrous. It would be like using a piece of new or undressed cloth to patch the rents of an old garment, with the result that the heavy new cloth enlarges the rent instead of mending it. It would also be like putting new wine, still unfer-

¹ Twice a week they fasted. On Thursday because, according to tradition, Moses reascended Mount Sinai on that day after the people's trespass of the golden calf; and on Monday because on that day he returned with the tables of the Law (Exodus, xxxiv. 4, 29).

² The thought of His death is now ever present to Jesus. Already He had referred to it in speaking to the Jews (John ii. 19) and to Nicodemus (John iii. 14).

mented, into old and brittle "bottles" or wine-skins. Once the fermentation begins, the skins are burst and the wine is lost. The gospel of Christ has its own distinctive spirit and must be free to give expression to it in its own way. You cannot combine the law and grace. You cannot restrain the fellowship of the renewed soul with God in Christ by old forms and rites that were appointed for a different purpose and have served their day.

LESSON VI

THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

Chap. ii. 23-iii. 6

JESUS had been led by the opposition of the Scribes to proclaim Himself "the Physician" and "the Bridegroom." He was now to claim yet another title, viz. "**Lord of the Sabbath.**" Here we will note—

I. *THE SCRIBES' VIEW OF THE SABBATH.*—In no point of observance were the Scribes and Pharisees more scrupulous than in keeping the Sabbath day inviolate. The Divine command declared, "In it thou shalt not do any work." But the Scribes for generations had taken it upon them to define in detail what works were unlawful. They had specified thirty-nine kinds of forbidden labour, and to each of these they added a number of inferences and deductions, making up a heavy burden of enactment for the people even to remember, much more to observe. The word of God was thus made of none effect by the load of tradition. On the Sabbath day here mentioned (*vv.* 23, 24) Jesus and the disciples chanced to walk through a corn-field, making their way along the trodden path common in those regions, hardly wide enough to permit a man to pass clear of the crop. As they went, the disciples in their homely rural fashion began to

pluck the ears of corn—probably wheat or maize—and to eat, “rubbing them in their hands” (cf. Luke vi). At once the Pharisees, apparently at hand and on the watch, found fault. Why? Not because of the liberty taken with a neighbour’s crop. Such an act was permitted by the law of Moses (Deut. xxiii. 25). But the Scribes in interpreting the fourth commandment had set down “reaping” as one of the thirty-nine works forbidden on the Sabbath, and they now maintained that to pluck ears of corn was to reap, and to rub off the husk with the hands was to thresh.

2. *OUR LORD’S REPLY.*—It may be viewed as threefold.

(a) In *vv.* 25, 26 He met them on their own ground, and pointed to a case the force of which they would admit. David had not scrupled to depart from the strict letter of the law when he and his followers had need (1 Sam. xxi. 1-6). He had eaten the consecrated bread from the table in God’s sanctuary, and the high-priest, Abiathar, or Ahimelech his father—probably both—had countenanced his deed.

Moreover, this had happened in all likelihood on the Sabbath day, when the weekly supply of shewbread was renewed (Lev. xxiv. 8, 9). If David, the man after God’s own heart, had thus relieved his hunger without blame, surely the disciples might eat a little raw corn, even contrary to the tradition of the elders.

(b) In *v.* 27 Jesus laid down the principle on which the Sabbath law was based. The day of rest was made for the sake of man, not man for the day of rest. It is not an arbitrary appointment for which we are allowed to see no reason except the will of God. It is God’s gift to man—a wise provision for the need of man’s soul and body, and God desires no man to use it to his hurt. Therefore, for the disciples to starve on the Sabbath day rather than employ the simple means at hand to relieve hunger would have been a mistaken sacrifice of the spirit to the letter. Any observance of the Sabbath law of rest, worthy of intelligent creatures, must not lose

sight of its beneficent purpose towards man and beast.

(c) Against the authority of the Scribes Jesus sets His own, "Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (v. 28). He is the Son of Man, the representative head of the human race. He is also the Divine Lord of all creation, and therefore He is Lord of the Sabbath day. It is for Him and not for the Scribes to interpret the Sabbath law to His disciples. Only under the control of Jesus Christ, and in loyal obedience to the guiding of His Spirit, can this gift of God be used aright—neither neglected and despised on the one hand, nor turned into a grievous burden on the other.

The Man with the Withered Hand, iii. 1-6.—The Lord of the Sabbath had justified a "work of necessity." He was also to assert His lordship in a "work of mercy."

1. *SCENE IN THE SYNAGOGUE.*—On the following Sabbath day (Luke vi. 6) after that just referred to, Jesus on entering the synagogue found there a man with a withered hand—tradition says, a stone-mason, whose hand had been injured, and who now sought Jesus to save him from the prospect of beggary. He also found the Scribes and Pharisees keeping watch on Him as usual. His recent defence of His disciples and His former Sabbath works of mercy (i. 23-34) led them to hope that they would here find ground for a charge against Him. Acts of healing were among the works forbidden by their tradition. St. Mark sets a graphic picture before us: the Lord in all the meek dignity of His calling; the sufferer standing by in hope of a blessing; the Scribes and Pharisees on the watch for cause of offence, breaking the Sabbath grievously by coming to God's house in sinful malice, and the expectant congregation.

2. *THE LORD'S QUESTION.*—We note how fully Jesus meets His opponents here. He feels that He is challenged and must defend Himself. He bids the man "stand forth" before them all (v. 3). He puts a

question to the Pharisees (*v.* 4) that sets in strong contrast His purpose of love towards the sufferer with their violent designs towards Himself. He hopes by quiet reasoning to convince them, but in vain. They will admit nothing. They had not come there to reason but to condemn. He gazes upon them with mournful anger—the displeasure which obstinate perverseness most properly arouses, mingled with grief at the thought of the spiritual ruin it would work.

3. *THE SUFFERER CURED, v. 5.*—By a word the sufferer's ready faith is called forth, and promptly meets its reward. In the obedient effort to stretch forth his hand he finds that it is restored. No better example could there be of genuine faith revealing itself in obedience.

Thus did Jesus vindicate His lordship over the Sabbath day. We prize the liberty He has here declared to us. But if we claim discretion and power to supply our needs on the Lord's day, and to set aside arbitrary traditions that would hinder us, let us not omit the Sabbath works of mercy that the gospel also prescribes. The law of Christian liberty is the law of love.

The Bitterness of the Pharisees, *v.* 6.—Of their intense hatred to Jesus they give proof by taking counsel with the Herodians, their natural rivals, the aristocratic frequenters of the king's court, how they might destroy Him. In beliefs and social position those two sects stood apart. Yet now they find a common ground of meeting in fierce conspiracy against Him who loved them both and gave Himself for them. There is a fellowship for evil as well as for good. Sectarian jealousy is bad enough, but a lower depth is reached when sects forget their quarrels in such a cause as this

LESSON VII

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Chap. iii. 7-19

IN last lesson we observed how the hatred of the Pharisees had grown so bitter against Jesus as to cause them to join with their opponents, the Herodians, in planning His destruction (*v.* 6). The rigid Puritans and the careless courtiers held fellowship in evil. But His hour was not yet come.

A Multitude on the Shore, *vv.* 7-12.—From the synagogue Jesus withdrew to the seaside, and there He bade His disciples keep a boat in readiness as a means of safety, and also for relief from thronging crowds. If the hostility of the scribes had increased, the common people heard Him gladly. We are struck by the various elements of the multitude that now followed Him (*vv.* 7, 8). From Galilee and Tyre and Sidon in the north; from Judæa and its great capital; from beyond Idumæa in the far south; from the regions beyond Jordan in the east;—they came, eager to touch Him, “as many as had plagues” (*v.* 10), drawn by the fame of His compassion and power to heal.

The dæmon-haunted too were constrained to acknowledge Him (*v.* 11). The pure and holy presence of Jesus so disturbed the unclean spirits that their victims fell down before Him in agony, soon to rise up in freedom and peace. We note here the stern attitude always maintained by our Lord towards those evil spirits (*cf.* i. 25). They—the dæmons, not the victims after cure—are peremptorily stopped in their proclamations of His Godhead. Not from such witnesses would He accept the testimony for which Simon son of Jonas was once called blessed (*Matt.* xvi. 16, 17).

The Twelve Apostles Called, *vv.* 13-19.—In the

midst of this exciting time Jesus now turned to the discharge of a momentous duty. He knew that His earthly career would be brief. The Gospel message to mankind would soon have to be proclaimed by other voices. Such was God's ordinance. Jesus was to depart; and though the Holy Spirit would abide in the Church, and take of His truth and show it unto men, yet the work of spreading the knowledge of that truth and applying it to the wants of mankind must be done by His faithful followers. Therefore the Lord now made it His care to select from the large band of disciples (or learners) twelve men, perhaps with a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, whom He "ordained" or appointed to be the founders of His Church (Eph. ii. 20). In regard to this great occasion we note—

1. *THE MANNER OF APPOINTMENT*, v. 13.—Before making it Jesus retired to a neighbouring mountain, and spent the night in solitary prayer (Luke vi. 12). It was His mode of preparation for every great crisis in His career. Then in the morning He summoned to Him the most eligible of the disciples "whom He would," and of these He set apart twelve to be apostles or delegates.

2. *THE PURPOSE OF THE APPOINTMENT*, v. 14.—
(a.) "That they should be with Him." Five of them were already His daily attendants. At least two others had known Him for more than a year (John i. 43-49). But henceforward the whole twelve were to be His constant care, that He might impress the stamp of His influence upon them, and store their memories with His teaching and works of love (Acts i. 21, 22).

All successful work for Christ must begin with this condition, "to be with Him."

b. "That He might send them forth to preach," v. 14. Having been with Him, they were to go forth to speak that which they knew and testify what they had seen. The message of the apostles was, in the first instance, mainly a narrative of their experience.

c. "And to have power to heal sickness and to cast

out devils" (v. 15). The work of power and mercy was to accompany the Word (cf. 1 Cor. iv. 20).

The actual despatch of the apostles on their mission was not yet for a little time (vi. 7). Meanwhile the first purpose of their appointment was fulfilled, and in the Master's daily fellowship and counsel they were trained for future service.

3. *THE PERSONS APPOINTED.*—There are four lists of the twelve apostles given in Scripture, viz., Matt. x. 2-4; Mark iii. 16-19; Luke vi. 13-16; Acts i. 13-16.

In all, the names are identical or can be identified. And in all, the apostles are set forth in three groups, all of the same official standing, differing only in personal character, and in the degree of their intimacy with the Master. St. Mark gives them in the following order:—

First Group—*a.* Simon or Simeon, the Son of Jonas (John i. 42); called also Cephas or Peter (a rock). He is named first in all lists of the twelve. There was no official primacy conferred upon him. His position was due probably to his age and certainly to his devotion and force of character, in spite of occasional weakness. Several early Christian fathers maintain that St. Mark wrote this gospel "as the interpreter of Simon Peter," and there is evidence of his influence in it.

b. James, the son of Zebedee and Salome (Matt. xxvii. 56); the first apostle to die a martyr death (Acts xii. 2).

c. John, the brother of James, distinguished as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John xiii. 23). He was also the friend to whom Jesus, on the cross, committed the care of His mother (John xix. 26, 27).

d. Andrew, the brother of Simon, a native of Bethsaida, always to be honoured as having been the means of bringing his brother Simon to Jesus (John i. 41). All four were fishermen. Three of them were to be the Lord's chosen friends; privileged to attend upon Him on three notable occasions in His career (v. 37; ix. 2; xiv. 33).

Second Group—*a.* Philip. In all four lists he stands

first of this group. He was a native of Bethsaida, like Andrew and Simon; and was the first man we read of to whom Jesus said "Follow me" (John i. 43, 44).

b. Bartholomew, or the son of Tolmai, probably identical with Nathanael, brought to Jesus by Philip at Bethabara (John i. 45-49).

c. Matthew, or Levi, the son of Alphæus (see above on ii. 14, 15). The writer of a gospel record.

d. Thomas, known also as Didymus (a twin), a devoted disciple (John xi. 16), but oppressed with doubts (John xx. 25) until the Lord removed them (xx. 28).

Third Group—*a.* James, the son of Alphæus, sometimes called James the Less, probably the brother of Matthew; not to be confused with James the Lord's brother, head of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 13).

b. Thaddæus, also named "Lebbæus" (Matt. x. 3), and "Judas, brother—or more probably—son of James" (Luke vi. 16). Of this apostle only one saying is recorded (John xiv. 22).

c. Simon the Canaanite or Cananæan, in Greek Zelotes (Luke vi. 11). This man's title has no reference to the land of Canaan. He belonged to the Zealots, a fierce sect of Jewish fanatics. Simon's zeal now found a worthier object.

d. Judas Iscariot, "which also betrayed Him" (v. 19). In all lists of the apostles this name of bad repute comes last. And yet it might have been borne by a great saint; for "Iscariot" simply means "man of Kerioth," a village of Judæa (Jer. xlviii. 24). As far as we know, Judas was the only one of the twelve Apostles who did not belong to Galilee.

He was "the son of Simon" (John vi. 71), and a shrewd man of affairs. There is no good reason to suppose that he was an unprincipled person when chosen.

Regarding the twelve apostles numerous conjectures have been made. Their parentage, their relationship to the Lord and to one another, and their individual careers,

are all the subject of surmise and dispute. But little is really known, and to indulge in conjecture seems unprofitable. There is undoubted ground for believing that of the twelve, at least six were fishermen, one a tax-gatherer, and not one a scribe or professed teacher of divinity. There is no doubt that the apostles held a position and powers peculiar to themselves. It is idle to suppose that those powers have descended in the Church through any order of officials. The apostles were ordained ministers of Christ, and in that respect alone they have successors.

LESSON VIII

OFFICIOUS FRIENDS AND UNSCRUPULOUS FOES

Chap. iii. 19-35

BETWEEN the appointment of the twelve apostles, the account of which is closed in the first clause of *v.* 19, and the incident recorded in the last clause, there intervened several weeks of which St. Mark makes no mention. For the incidents of that period we must go to St. Luke (*vi.* 17-viii. 3).

The popular sensation still prevailed. On the return of Jesus to Capernaum from a journey in Galilee—probably to the house of Simon already mentioned—the crowd speedily assembled. In St. Mark's graphic narrative (*v.* 20), we see the humble home broken in upon; the rooms, the court, the corridor, the street doorway, all filled to overflowing; no space or leisure even for a hasty meal: and in the midst of it all, as St. Matthew tells us (*xii.* 22), Jesus relieved a poor man possessed of a blind and dumb devil, so that speech and hearing were restored to him.

I. The sensation thus renewed in Capernaum brought forward two sets of critics.

(1) *MISTAKEN FRIENDS*.—When the news of His return reached the mother and brethren of Jesus, and they heard of His twelve disciples and the increased excitement, they exclaimed, "He is beside himself" (v. 21), and set out for the house where He was to secure His person. Those good people were not wanting in love towards Him, but they lacked spiritual understanding.

The natural man was still too strong in them to perceive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 14). Notwithstanding all that Mary had learned in the past and the memories laid up in her heart, she and the sons of her home—whether her own children or her stepsons is uncertain—were still unable to realise the mission of Jesus. They feared that the toil and turmoil of the past weeks had overwrought His brain, and in loving anxiety they sought to save Him from harm.

(2) *UNSCRUPULOUS ENEMIES*.—The scribes from Jerusalem, whose hostility we have noticed (vv. 2, 6), were among the audience. They could not deny the miracles, especially that just performed on the dumb man, so they tried to discredit them by ascribing them to the powers of evil.

The title Beelzebub, or the god of flies—an old Phillistine deity—was parodied by the Jews into Beelzebul, the god of filth; and this epithet they often, as a coarse jest, applied to Satan, the master power of evil.

When, therefore, the murmur went round that wondering crowd, "He hath Beelzebul, the dung god, and by this prince of unclean spirits casteth He out unclean spirits," we recognise a ribald attempt of the scribes to decry Jesus and His work. And its wickedness was aggravated by the fact that it was made in bad faith by men whose conscience knew better. Thus both from well-meaning friends and bitter foes the Lord and His cause met with misrepresentation. The first erred in failing to apprehend the truth that Scripture and intercourse with Jesus ought to have taught them.

The second erred through malice and prejudice, which caused them to love the darkness rather than the light. The same opposition, different in outward forms, but identical in principle and motive, still harasses the Lord as He is represented by His Church and faithful followers, (Acts ix. 4, 5). Some friends of the cause of Christ misunderstand it in the most unaccountable way: and others, whose life the Gospel reproves, out of very spite seek to cast obloquy upon it.

II. The Lord's Reply.—Calmly, as one having authority, Jesus called the blasphemers before Him. He condescended to discuss the matter, and, on account of those sitting by, He spake in parables or figures of speech. In this reply we observe—

(1) His reasoned argument, *vv.* 23-26, "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

No family, or kingdom, or commonwealth of any kind can stand if rent by internal strife. Therefore it is the very foolishness of malice to impute such division to the subtle master-power of evil in the affairs of his wide empire.

We note that the Lord here, as elsewhere, distinctly speaks of Satan as a person, the head of a kingdom, whose ruling principle is opposition to Himself.

This argument is closed with a striking metaphor (*v.* 27). The strong man is evidently Satan. The house is this world, where the prince of evil has gained a footing, and, but for Redemption, would hold absolute rule. The spoiler of the strong man is Jesus Christ, who in His life and death has bound the strong man, and spoiled his house of the goods whereof he had robbed God. As yet the Saviour's conquest is imperfect. But the day is coming when He shall "put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). Meanwhile the finished work of atonement is the pledge and earnest of that final triumph.

(2) A Weighty Declaration, *vv.* 28, 29.

"Verily" or Amen, used by our Lord only to enforce His most weighty sayings, appears now in St. Mark for the first time. Under it we have—

a. A PRECIOUS ASSURANCE (v. 28).—The most grievous and wilful transgressor may be pardoned. Forgiveness is extended to every man in a condition to receive it. That condition involves penitence and faith according to the measure of light possessed by each.

b. A SOLEMN WARNING.—There is no forgiveness for him who blasphemes against the Holy Ghost. He is “guilty of an eternal sin” (R.V.).

What does this blasphemy signify?

From the tenor of this passage and from all we know of God’s working it can only consist of sin persisted in without penitence. It is a *state* rather than an *act*, and if souls become so hardened as to ascribe good deeds to Beelzebub, it is plain that they are in danger of so abiding in sin and condemnation. Such a soul “hath never forgiveness,” because it hath never repentance. By its own perversity it stands outside the door of grace and will not enter. Those scribes were warned in the most solemn manner of their perilous condition. But the warning amounted to a call to repent. To suppose a soul in this life penitent and anxious for pardon, yet denied it because of some past act or word against the Holy Ghost, is contrary to the tenor of Scripture.

III. **Kindred Natural and Spiritual**, vv. 31-35.

—While Jesus thus taught in the house, His mother and brethren—whose sentiments we read in v. 21—arrived at the door and sent Him a message to come out to them. The word was passed in and conveyed to Him by those sitting by.

The question has been much discussed. Who were the persons here named “His brethren”? Were they the sons of Mary and Joseph? Or were they the sons of Joseph by a former marriage? Or were they sons of a sister of Mary, and are they here styled “His brethren” in the general sense of kinsmen? We cannot here cite arguments and authorities, and for us Protestant Christians the question is one of more interest than importance.

It does not admit of a final answer. But in view of the importance ascribed to it by the Church of Rome

and their sympathisers, who countenance the worship of Mary as *ever Virgin*, it is well to point out that while we cannot affirm beyond doubt that the Lord's brethren were the sons of Mary and Joseph, there is nothing decisive to exclude that view, and there is much to be said in favour of it.

Moved by the well-meant but ill-judged interference of those relatives Jesus now laid down the divine rule of kindred.

The ties of nature are indeed sacred. No undutiful son can plead the example of Him who, conscious of His power and mission, still remained subject to His earthly parents at Nazareth, and wrought for thirty years at a humble craft amid the limitations of a poor man's home.

But more sacred are the ties of grace. Jesus declares that they who "do the will of God" (v. 35) stand to Him in a closer relationship than any kindred by blood. The highest affinity is also the deepest and most real. It brings men nearest to God and to one another. It bears the richest fruits of service and mutual goodwill. It endures beyond the grave in that life where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God (cf. xii. 25).

LESSON IX

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

Chap. iv. 1-20

THIS chapter marks a new phase in the teaching of our Lord. Again (iii. 7), under pressure from the crowd, we see Him repair to the lake, where He found relief, as before, by entering a boat and thence addressing the multitude on the shore. The scene is supposed to have been at Bethsaida, where the beach is steep and rocky, shelving abruptly to deep water. Here Jesus "taught

them many things by parables" (v. 2). Hitherto his teaching had been plain and direct. Illustrations were used, but mainly to enforce his arguments against gain-sayers, *e.g.* ii. 17-22. In last lesson we saw the term *parable* applied to brief metaphors so employed (iii. 23). Here it occurs for the first time in the sense usual in the gospels.

The word *parable* means literally a casting together or comparison, and in this general sense it includes all figurative teaching, whether proverb, fable, or allegory.

But the parables of our Lord are none of these. They have been well described as comprising—

1. A short pithy saying (vii. 14-17).
2. A comparison without a narrative, "Now learn a parable of the fig tree, etc" (xiii. 28).
3. "An earthly story with a heavenly meaning." And to the last class belong by far the greater number. Only it is to be noted that in every case the earthly story is a natural one, and implies a real correspondence between the visible figure and the spiritual truth it sets forth. This will best appear by considering:—

1. **The Parable of the Sower**, *vv.* 4-9.
2. **Its Purpose**, *vv.* 10-13.
3. **Its Interpretation**, *vv.* 14-25.

1. **The Parable.**—The scene described was very probably before the eyes of the speaker and his audience; certainly it was familiar to both. A field lies ready for seed. Across it runs a pathway trodden hard by many footsteps. Here and there stand clumps of thorn bushes, spreading year by year as the young shoots spring up. Throughout the field run ridges of rock scantily covered with mould, while in the intermediate hollows the soil is deep and good.

Over such a field Jesus describes a husbandman going forth to sow, and having recounted the various fates that befell the seed cast from his hand, He bids men mark how the natural world portrays the spiritual.

- (1) *SEED SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE*, v. 4.—The

hard trodden path affords no cover. This seed is exposed to every accident, and soon the watchful birds that follow the sower discover and devour it.

(2) *SEED SOWN ON STONY GROUND*, *vv.* 5, 6.—The ground thus described is not loose, pebbly soil, but solid rock thinly covered, so that the roots of the young corn plant cannot penetrate to moisture, and the heat of the sun causes a rapid and abnormal growth. A plant thus situated cannot possibly live.

(3) *SEED SOWN AMONG THORNS*, *v.* 7.—Here the soil does not lack depth, but it is foul with roots of thorn. At first the corn seed seems to thrive and give promise of a crop. But presently the thorns prevail, and the plant is overtopped and strangled. A sickly, starved, and useless growth is all that remains.

(4) *SEED SOWN ON GOOD GROUND*, *v.* 8.—The soil here is neither trodden by wayfarers, nor shallow and scorched, nor cumbered with thorn roots, but kindly, clean, and wholesome, so that the seed germinates and goes on to fruition. Yet in fruition there is diversity. Of the good ground, certain spots excel the rest, so that the increase is "some thirty and some sixty, and some an hundred."

In all those cases we note there is but the one sower, the one seed, the one sunshine, and the one rainfall (*Matt.* v. 45). The difference of result is due solely to the soil.

The admonition to hear (*v.* 9) is used by our Lord only on occasions of special moment (*Matt.* xi. 14, 15; xiii. 43; *Luke* xiv. 34, 35. And again, *Rev.* ii. 7, 11. 17, 29; iii. 6, 13, 22; xiii. 9).

2. **The Purpose of the Parable**, *vv.* 10-13.—The audience of Jesus at this time may be divided roughly into three classes: (1) The twelve Apostles, His most intimate friends; (2) Disciples and followers, here termed "They that were about Him"; and (3) The mixed crowd, including hostile scribes and idle hearers, described as "them that are without." After the latter class had dispersed, we read that the followers of Jesus begged

him to expound the parable just uttered. His reply was weighty, and at first somewhat startling. He told them that He spake in parables to them in order that they might better apprehend the mysteries or deeper truths of the kingdom of God.¹

But the parables had a sterner purpose towards "them that are without" (v. 12). To these they were a judgment, not a boon. Not that the Lord ever hindered any soul from learning the way of life. Such a supposition is inconceivable. But he does not cast pearls before swine. Those who, like the scribes, reject his plain teaching, or, like the idle crowds, pay it little heed, are left behind when He comes to expound the mystery of the kingdom in parables. They hear the story, but the state of heart into which they have fallen prevents them from perceiving its force. By their own sin and error they have hung a veil over their understanding. The penalty of neglect is incapacity. The question in v. 13 is peculiar to St. Mark. It declares the simplicity of this parable and the Master's intention to instruct the disciples in the mystery of the kingdom by further parabolic teaching. But this time He consents to explain so that in future they may the better understand.

3. **The Interpretation.**—The Sower is God in all the means and ordinances whereby He imparts His word to man. The seed is spiritual truth, the word of God. The soil is the heart. God sows the seed broadcast—an instruction to all His servants. It falls on the trodden path, the rocky ridges, the thorny places, and the good ground. To all types and varieties of character is the gospel addressed. See how it is received.

(1) *THE WAYSIDE HEARERS, OR HARD-HEARTED*, v. 15.—These have often heard the word without obedience, and now the familiar sound has ceased to impress. The most solemn truths, proclaimed in all earnestness, never get deeper than the ear, and "Satan cometh straightway" by one of his thousand agents, e.g.

¹ The word "mystery" here denotes not, as with us, a secret, but a truth once hidden and now revealed.

idle thoughts, foolish conversation, worldly distractions; and the seeds of truth, lying exposed, are speedily picked up.

(2) *THE STONY GROUND HEARERS, OR SHALLOW-HEARTED*, vv. 16-17.—These hearers come a step further on the way to fruition than the last. But their nature is shallow and weak. They are easily stirred, and as easily discouraged. They hear the word, and “straightway” receive it with gladness. Affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, and “straightway” they stumble. They are consistent, but it is in their instability.

(3) *THE THORNY GROUND HEARERS, OR HALF-HEARTED*, vv. 18, 19.—These advance yet further ere they break down. They have heard the word, not carelessly, but well. The soil of their heart is strong and deep, and there is every promise of fruition. But there are rivals already in possession, and these prevail. The cares and anxieties of life; the illusions of wealth; the ambitions and longings after what this world deems best, all combine to “choke the word.” A day must come in every life when the soul has to choose between God and Mammon, and then these souls fail, and their fair promise is blighted. The ways of the world thenceforward bulk more and more largely, and their interest in the kingdom of Christ is on the wane.

(4) *THE GOOD GROUND HEARERS, OR TRUE-HEARTED*, v. 20.—Their great distinction is fruitfulness, *i.e.* the formation of godly character, the fruits of the spirit (Gal. v. 22, 23). Of this all the others came short. And without this all is vain.

Two reflections:—

a. The condition of none of those souls is fixed and unchangeable. By the grace of God the hard heart may become receptive; the shallow may receive strength; the worldly may be cleared of weeds and sanctified. No honest and good heart is good by nature, but only through the blessing of God on prayer and watchful effort, and these are within the reach of all. Therefore

“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov. iv. 23).

b. Even among the honest and good there are degrees of fruit-bearing, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred, each according to the measure of his faithfulness. When we mark the attainments of God’s best saints, we are tempted to lose heart. Our crop looks so poor and scanty. But let us give thanks that the poorest is accepted by the Lord of the harvest, and prove our gratitude by striving after a larger increase.

LESSON X

FURTHER PARABLES

Chap. iv. 21-34

THE short pithy sayings in this passage are evidently meant to enforce the parable just recorded.

I. **The Burning Lamp**, *vv.* 21-25.—The words of *v.* 21 may be better rendered “Is a lamp brought to be put under a measure or under a couch, and not to be set on a lamp stand?” The word we translate “bushel” was the Roman “modius,” and held about a peck. “Bed” means, not a pallet, as in *ii.* 10, but a couch raised above the ground, and therefore capable of concealing a lamp beneath it.

In this brief parable Jesus taught that the “mystery of the kingdom” now revealed to His disciples was not meant to remain hidden in their hearts and minds. They were as lamps kindled by Him, but only in order that their light should shine in the world (*Matt.* v. 14-16). The bearing of fruit just referred to would consist largely of imparting blessing to others (*Matt.* x. 27). In verse 23 particular attention is called to this point. We note next—

AN EMPHATIC CAUTION, v. 24.—“Take heed *what* ye hear.” In a parallel passage in St. Luke’s gospel the Lord bids His followers take heed *how* they hear (Luke viii. 18). Doubtless both counsels were uttered more than once. Both are needed still. If “faith cometh by hearing” so does ruin. As much care is required with regard to the *subject* of our hearing as concerning the *manner* of it. No doubt we may be obliged at times to listen to what is unprofitable. Take heed that such hearing be only suffered under urgent necessity.

A Christian within hearing of scandal, or foul language, or blasphemy, ought to act like a prudent man in an infected atmosphere. He leaves it at once, unless duty calls him to remain. And in the latter case he takes all possible precautions; and perhaps succeeds in doing something to purify it. The same rule applies to that which we gaze at, or read. Our responsibility lies in “taking heed” that in so far as choice is allowed us we follow the good and shun the evil.

THE REASON FOR THE CAUTION, vv. 24, 25.—On hearing depends character and destiny. Hear the truth of God and live by it, and your reward shall be wisdom, strength, fulness of blessing. Neglect the truth and incline the ear to folly, and the result shall inevitably be weakness and loss of present attainment. It is a principle of the kingdom of God in things temporal and spiritual. “The soul of the diligent shall be made fat” (Prov. xiii. 4). “An idle soul shall suffer hunger” (Prov. xix. 15).

II. **The Seed growing secretly, vv. 26-29.**—This short parable is recorded only by St. Mark, and declared to be one of the manifold aspects of “the kingdom of God,” *i.e.* the course of God’s spiritual government administered by Christ. We note—

(1) *THE PARABLE.*—It describes the common practice of a husbandman. He sows seed in duly prepared ground, then goes about his various avocations, sleeping by night and rising to work by day, and the

seed is left to the forces of nature to develop and ripen. Between the end of seed-time and the commencement of harvest the husbandman can take no active part in the progress of his crop. He can only protect it from depredators, pull up the most obvious weeds, and remove some of the obstacles to growth. It is the vital germ that, under the laws of God's Providence, gradually brings forth blade, and ear, and full corn; the sower "knoweth not how." His work is a work of faith. From his experience in the past he believes in the stability of nature, and acts accordingly.

The statement in *v.* 28, "The earth bringeth forth fruit of herself" (lit. automatically), regards the earth strictly in its relation to man. Its relation to God, in whom all things live and move and have their being, is not touched upon.

(2) *THE INTERPRETATION.*—The sower here evidently cannot mean Christ (*v.* 27), but a teacher of divine truth working in faith. When he has done his best to clear the souls under his care from weeds of error, and to sow the seed of the Word, and to protect the tender shoots of immature faith from the attacks of enemies, he must leave the issue to God. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase, and He alone understands how in each separate soul the increase is brought forth. We observe in this parable—

(a) The gradual character of spiritual growth, *v.* 28. There must be a moment of beginning, but it is usually imperceptible. The development of the fruit of the Spirit is gradual, and takes place in God's own time and way, man "knoweth not how." No two spiritual histories are exactly the same, but in all there is growth from small beginnings to full maturity.

(b) The dependence of growth from first to last upon God. Its conditions are laid down, and when these are fulfilled, growth is assured. But it is growth in grace, from the first quickening of spiritual life in the soul up to the last moment ere grace becomes glory. It is for

Christ's servants to avoid impatient efforts to force spiritual results when prayer and faithful teaching seem to fail. "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James v. 7).

(c) The harvest, *v.* 29.—What does that figure represent? Is it the Lord's second appearing? "the end of the world" (Matt. xiii. 39)? Hardly so, when we remember that the sower and the reaper are here the same; not God, but man, God's servant. The harvest, when the sickle is put in, represents any point in the course of the spiritual history either of an individual or of a community when the seed of the word has borne fruit, and they who sow in tears reap in joy. Such a time of ingathering was on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41). But wherever a faithful missionary finds converts, or a pastor sees his flock quickened and edified, or any worker for Christ meets with success, there is a harvest. We have not always to wait till the next world in order to reap the fruit of our sowing, or for him that reapeth to receive wages (cf. John iv. 35, 36).

III. The Mustard Seed, *vv.* 30-34.—The Master now associates His hearers with Himself, and proposes that they seek yet another parable to show forth another aspect of God's wondrous kingdom (*v.* 30). This He finds in a grain of mustard seed. Not the smallest of all seeds, but the small kind commonly sown in that land. Yet this very small seed "becometh greater than all herbs," *i.e.* pot-herbs. Nay more, it assumes a different character from that of any pot-herb, and "shooteth out great branches"—a shelter and place of rest for the fowls of the air. Travellers describe the mustard plant as from seven to ten feet high, with branches capable of supporting not a bird merely, but the weight of a man.

So is the kingdom of God in its visible extension. The germ of spiritual life in a soul is small at first, but it expands until it changes the whole character and conduct. The lowly manger at Bethlehem contained an infant, who in due time wrought out the redemption of the

world. The little band in the upper chamber at Jerusalem (Acts i. 13) has grown into the great Catholic Church, numbering on earth some eight hundred million souls, comprising the many sects and denominations of Christendom. The most powerful nations have learned to pay homage to the Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest institutions are glad to find strength and support in the fellowship of His body, the Church.

With many such parables did Jesus continue to instruct those "that were about Him," as they were able to hear (*v.* 33). For them this form of teaching was still the best fitted to interest and impress. He who knew what was in man would not tax their understanding unduly (John xvi. 12; 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2). But there remained a few, here called "His disciples" (*v.* 34), and no doubt including the apostles, who were capable of comprehending deeper views of truth; and to these the Lord afterwards, in the leisure of private converse, expounded the parables in their full meaning (*cf.* Ps. ciii. 7).

LESSON XI

THE TEMPEST STILLED—THE DEMONIAK SET FREE

Chap. iv. 35—v. 1-20

I. The Lord of Nature, *vv.* 35-41.—In the last lesson we saw Jesus Christ as a prophet unfolding the "mystery of the kingdom of God." We see Him now as a king asserting His authority over the forces of nature, and restraining those of evil. We note that the incidents recorded in ch. iii. 20—iv. 35 happened in one day. At the close of it our Lord, without landing from the boat whence He had addressed the multitude, bade the disciples make for the eastern shore of the lake, some six miles off, where, in the thinly-peopled region round Gergesa, He might hope for much-needed rest.

In the graphic details of St. Mark (*v.* 36), we see the disciples disperse the multitude, those who had come in small boats still lingering near. Then they set sail, and Jesus, in His exhaustion, at once falls asleep in the stern, with His head resting on the steersman's leathern cushion.

1. *PERIL AND PANIC*, *vv.* 37, 38.—Soon a storm arose. The Sea of Galilee, lying 600 feet below ocean level, among steep mountains cleft by narrow gorges, is singularly liable to sudden gusts of wind. One of those squalls now struck the fishing-boat, and notwithstanding all the efforts of her crew, she began to fill. The situation was critical, and still Jesus slumbered on, too tired to be disturbed by the noise and tossing.

In the disciples anxiety soon grew to panic. In their extremity faith broke down, and we hear the cry of wonder and reproach, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" The same spiritual experience overtakes Christ's servants still. We take Him for our Master in all sincerity; in His service we find comfort and high hope. Then some day an unlooked-for trial comes, and faith gives way. We do not lose all hold of Christ, but for the moment assurance and confidence depart. Confusion and misgiving prevail.

2. *THE PERIL REMOVED*, *v.* 39.—Jesus had lain down in His weakness, a worn-out man. He arose in His might, very God, "without Him was not anything made that was made" (John i. 3).

"He rebuked the wind." We note the same word used to describe His treatment of a *dæmon* (i. 25), and of a fever (Luke iv. 39). There is no invocation of God's authority, but we hear the direct, peremptory command to the billows, "Peace, be still," lit. be muzzled (cf. i. 25). "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Without going so far as to ascribe this storm directly to Satan, we are bound to recognise in it part of the disorder in outward nature that renders her forces destructive to man, and Jesus Christ, in rebuking the storm, revealed Himself the Lord of nature and the

restorer of harmony ; a parable of the greater work He came to perform in the spiritual world.

3. *THE DISCIPLES REBUKED*, v. 40.—St. Matthew's Gospel makes our Lord, on awaking, reprove the disciples first, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith," and then arise and quell the storm. Jesus may well have done so, and after that added the words here given (v. 40). The "no faith," (lit. "not yet faith"), of St. Mark would then be interpreted by the "little faith" of St. Matthew, and the Lord's reproof would appear addressed to the unreasonableness which, after all they had lately seen and heard, caused the disciples to lose confidence so easily. That reproof still applies to unworthy fears and misgivings. Jesus does not always calm storms and rebuke tempests in life. But He has done and taught enough to assure His followers that with Him no real harm can befall them (1 Peter iii. 13). His assurance is ever "Fear thou not ; for I am with thee : be not dismayed ; for I am thy God" (Isaiah xli. 10).

4. *THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE*, v. 41.—(a) "The disciples feared exceedingly." They viewed their Master with an increasing reverence that shows how imperfectly they had hitherto apprehended His character. No doubt they now began to find an answer to the question, "What manner of man is this?" that led them to realise that He was more than man.

(b) It taught confidence and courage. The disciples were to encounter many a storm, physical and spiritual, in the ministry committed to them. The memory of that night on the Sea of Galilee would often recur to mind, and cheer them when tempted to despair.

II. **The Vanquisher of Demons**, vv. 1-20.—The scene of this miracle was near the town of Gergesa, now Khersa, opposite Capernaum. In the Revised Version we read "Gerasenes" for "Gadarenes." The Lord and His disciples had landed in the region of Gaulonitis, once named Bashan, a thinly-peopled district, where the hills descend abruptly to deep water, and caves are

still used as places for burial. In the graphic account of St. Mark we see:—

1. *THE DEMONIAK, vv. 2-5.*—From among the cave tombs there emerges a wild figure, who had for some time haunted the spot. St. Matthew mentions two such persons. One of them no doubt was so much the more notable as to cause Mark and Luke to overlook the other. This hapless being was a terror to the district. All attempts to restrain him by force had failed. By night and by day his doleful cries were heard as he wandered on the hills, and ever and anon in a paroxysm of frenzy seized sharp splinters of rock, and gashed his own flesh.

Let us bear in mind that this man's terrible affliction is not described as due to past misconduct. Only as in a parable can we liken his condition to that of one enslaved by sin, helpless, ruined, cruel to himself, and a danger to all around.

2. *THE DEMONIAK'S APPROACH TO JESUS, vv. 6-10.*—The strange double personality, noticed in other cases of demoniacal possession (i. 24), is now evident. The man appears to act at one moment from his own impulse, and at the next from that of the demons.

He runs to meet Jesus, and bows with reverence before Him. The Lord commands the unclean spirit to come out of the man (v. 8). At once the man becomes the spokesman of the demon, and a yell of protest is heard. "What is there to me and to Thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not" (v. 7). The holy presence of Jesus was torture to the evil spirits. So was the order to cease from tormenting their victim. The question "What is thy name?" (v. 9), seems addressed to the man in order to soothe him, and recall his self-consciousness. But his reply, begun in his own person, is finished in the name of the demons, "*My* name is —Legion: for *we* are many" (v. 9). The term "Legion" describes a battalion of 6000 Roman soldiers, then the oppressors of the earth. The demons em-

ployed it not "to terrify Jesus," as has been alleged, but to proclaim the man's complete thralldom and their triumphant possession of him.

Yet again the poor man speaks ; and now he voices the demons' crave not to be driven forth "into the abyss" (Luke viii. 31). We are struck by the likeness to a victim of sin clinging madly to his vices—his drunkenness, his lusts, his gambling, his usury—well aware that they are destroying him body and soul, at times bewailing his lot, yet fascinated, and resisting every effort to set him free.

3. *THE DELIVERANCE*, *vv.* 11-16.—The episode of the swine cannot be fully explained. We know too little of the ways of God, and the working of the spirit world. Conjecture is worse than useless. Enough to accept the facts as St. Mark clearly records them. As to difficulties on the score of cruelty to dumb animals "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (Ps. xxiv. 1). Every day thousands of dumb creatures are lawfully slain for food and clothing (Genesis ix. 3). Why not 2000 swine to help the cure of a demoniac, and the relief of a terror-stricken district?

The neighbours gather and find the late maniac "clothed, and in his right mind," sitting at the feet of Jesus (*v.* 15). He uses his newly-found liberty by taking the humble place of a disciple. In the spiritual sphere humility is the indispensable token of a changed heart.

4. *THE CONDUCT OF THE GERASENES*, *vv.* 16, 17.—There is not only anger at the loss of their swine, but vague dread of the supernatural. Theirs was the selfish fear that comes from ignorance and unbelief. So do we still find worldly-minded persons behave in presence of religious enthusiasm. It scares them. If it should threaten to interfere with their pleasure and material profit they grow irritated. Instead of trying to comprehend its working, and share the blessing, they only long for the quickened interest to die down. And presently their wish is gratified, to their own unspeakable loss. Christ forces His grace upon no man.

5. *THE RESCUED MAN AT LIBERTY*, vv. 18-20.—Very different was the conduct of the rescued sufferer. His first use of liberty was to sit at the Lord's feet a humble disciple; the next, to beg to remain in His personal fellowship. Nowhere else could he feel so safe or learn so much. But Jesus had another use for him now. The man's own home and friends had known him as a terror. Let them see for themselves the change, and hear his own account of the mercy vouchsafed him. So the late slave of demons shows his gratitude still further by prompt obedience and willing service. First his home and friends, and then ten neighbouring cities, marvel at the story of divine compassion. He whom Christ has set free from the bondage of sin, must see to it that the change is felt in his daily home life, as well as proclaimed to the world, if he would prove it genuine, guard against relapse, and confirm his loyalty and love.

LESSON XII

THE CONQUEROR OF DISEASE AND DEATH

Chap. v. 21-43

IN this passage we have as it were a miracle within a miracle. One work of grace and power interrupts another. Both are the fruit of faith. The faith of the ruler is acknowledged, tested, and rewarded. That of the woman is rewarded, confirmed, and enlightened.

I. The Ruler's Faith acknowledged, vv. 21-24.—Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue—*i.e.*, an elder of the Jewish congregation at Capernaum. He and his brethren were not hostile to Jesus, like the scribes from Jerusalem. Already they had besought the Lord on behalf of their friend the centurion (Luke vii. 3-5). So now, in his extremity, with a beloved child in peril of

death, it was but natural for Jairus to appeal to Him by whom he had seen many sufferers relieved. We do not know what the *opinion* of Jairus was concerning Jesus, whether he believed Him to be the Messiah, the Son of God, or merely a benevolent prophet gifted with the power of healing. But of his *faith* there is no question. On the Lord landing from the boat, Jairus hastens to meet Him, prostrates himself before Him, and in public urges his request (v. 23). Here are genuine reverence and personal trust. And at once they are acknowledged by Christ. Jesus "went with him," and the crowd followed eager and curious (v. 24).

II. The Interruption, vv. 25-34.—In the striking incident here recorded we mark—

1. *THE WOMAN'S NEED*, vv. 25, 26.—Tradition says she was a stranger from Cæsarea Philippi, in the north. For twelve years she had suffered grievous infirmity that had worn out her strength, exhausted her means through attempts at a remedy, and excluded her by law from all church and social life (Lev. xv. 25-27). No case could well have been more pitiable.

2. *THE WOMAN'S FAITH*, vv. 28, 29.—She had heard of Jesus, how He had "healed many that were sick of divers diseases" (i. 34). And she became convinced that His powers would meet her case. No doubt her faith was ignorant and unspiritual. There is no mark of appreciation of the holy character and divine teaching of Jesus. She only thought of a healing power in the very touch of His garment, and, with natural modesty, she hoped to achieve this touch unknown to Him and unnoticed in the crowd. But her faith was also strong and resolute. It brought her on a toilsome journey to Capernaum; it gave her courage, wasted and weak as she was, to mingle in that throng, and finally to reach the Saviour. Ignorant faith has great drawbacks; but if only it be sincere and directed to Jesus Christ, the root of the matter is in it. "Him (or her) that cometh to Me," with honest purpose and in real need, "I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37).

3. *THE LORD'S RESPONSE.*—*a. He healed the infirmity, v. 29.* Before a word was said on either side sincere faith met with its reward. So is it with many ignorant souls to-day. Their faith is mixed with superstition, or woefully narrow and uncharitable, but amid their errors they have a personal trust in One mighty to save. And they receive the blessing of peace. They realise, they hardly know how, that a vital change has taken place in them.

b. He compelled acknowledgment, vv. 30-33. Had the woman been allowed to depart unnoticed, though she might have attained a bodily cure, how great the blessing she would have missed! How different, how poor and inadequate, would have been her conception of Jesus Christ!

For the believer's own spiritual health the Lord requires the confession of the mouth to follow the belief, however narrow, of the heart (cf. Rom. x. 10).

c. He enlightened the woman's mind and gave her confidence, v. 34. The question "Who touched me?" the disciples' reply, and the interview that followed, show how the touch of faith was distinguished from that of bodily proximity. In spiritual concerns, too, personal faith is the one connecting link between the Lord's power and the believer's needs. Nothing else will do. Some cling to ideas of mechanical contact by sacraments and ordinances. Those ordinances are precious, but only as channels of spiritual grace. Without faith on the part of the receiver they cannot "become an effectual means of salvation." That woman went home not only cured in body but instructed in soul, and her heart warmed for ever with a personal devotion towards Him who had treated her so tenderly and wisely.

All true faith is blessed, but thrice blessed is he who knows in whom he has believed (2 Tim. i. 12).

III. **The Ruler's Faith Tried, vv. 35-40.**

1. *BY THE DELAY.*—Throughout the interruption just noticed we can imagine how anxious and impatient the spirit of Jairus would become. His faith had been

acknowledged, but he was now called to tarry the Lord's leisure.

2. *BY THE MESSAGE FROM HOME, v. 35.*—It would seem as if there was in his home little sympathy with his errand to Jesus. As soon as the child's life appeared to have gone, messengers are promptly despatched to bring the father back. The tidings appear to have staggered him, for we see the Lord as it were reach forth a steadying hand in the words of reassurance (*v. 36*).

3. *BY THE SCENE IN THE HOUSE, v. 38.*—"A tumult," general confusion, a band of hired mourners raising a clamour, and, in the midst of it all, the lifeless form of his beloved child. To this we must add the scornful laughter when the Lord pronounced her asleep. That the ruler's faith lived through those trials proves how strong and genuine it was. The Lord did him honour in allowing his faith to be so tested.

IV. **The Ruler's Faith rewarded, vv. 40-43.**—The friendly confidence of Jesus, the prompt consent to the request to go with him, the words of reassurance when faith seemed in peril, and the admission to the death chamber when all but the chosen three were excluded—all show how high was the respect the ruler's faith had won for him. And then, to crown all, the boon is granted abundantly. Jairus had sought to have his child relieved from danger. Jesus brings her back from the dead.

The Lord spake of sleep (*v. 39*), not because there was no death in the usual sense of the word, but, as in the case of Lazarus of Bethany (John xi. 14), because He knew that its present victory would be brief. He is the Lord of life, and at His word of power the king of terrors must yield up his sway.

The tender summons, "Talitha Cumi" (little maid arise), followed by the homely direction that "something be given her to eat" (*v. 43*), and the strict command that she be not made a gazing-stock to the idle and curious rabble, combine to form a wondrous picture of majesty, wisdom, and loving-kindness.

The analogy of the spiritually dead is here too evident to be overlooked.

We learn by the experience of Jairus to be diligent in intercession for those whom we love, even when in the eyes of the world their state seems hopeless. The younger and more tender the heart the less arduous is the work of restoring spiritual life. The Lord calls such quietly and gently. His wisest servants and "the father and the mother of the maiden" are the most fitting witnesses and counsellors. To their care He leaves the lambs of His flock, with command that they be fed (John xxi. 15); and also that they be not distracted by unwholesome excitement and publicity.

LESSON XIII

REJECTION AT NAZARETH—THE APOSTLES SENT FORTH—THE BAPTIST SLAIN

Chap. vi. 1-29

I. Rejection at Nazareth, vv. 1-6.—From Capernaum a short journey brought Jesus and His disciples to Nazareth, the home of His childhood. Several months had passed since His last visit there, when He had been driven forth with violence (Luke iv. 29). Now the Nazarenes received another chance. The reputation of the mighty works of Jesus had preceded Him, and, as formerly, He came to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and taught.

From St. Mark's narrative we see that Jesus' presence formed a test of the spiritual state of the Nazarenes. That they were astonished was natural (v. 2). But if their minds had been candid and teachable, wonder would have grown to reverence and they would have glorified God. Instead of that "they were offended at Him."

The faith which is "the evidence of things not seen" was lacking. They refer contemptuously to His humble relatives, still amongst them (*v.* 3)—(cf. *iii.* 31), who were, according to tradition, the children of Joseph by a former marriage—and remark, with a sneer, "Is not this the carpenter?" Little did those Nazarenes dream how their words uttered in scorn would be prized by succeeding generations. They add a new dignity to honest toil by reminding us that the Lord Himself plied a poor man's craft.

We note the effects of the Nazarenes' unbelief:—

1. *THE LORD'S WORKS OF LOVE WERE HINDERED*, *v.* 5.—The purpose of those works was not to overawe opponents, but to confirm and reward faith. And faith formed a condition of their performance. Like spiritual grace, they were forced upon no one. Unbelief checked their course. Yet even here Jesus found a remnant, "a few sick folk," with faith to be healed. Jesus here teaches us to make the best of circumstances and do what good we can even when opportunities are small.

2. *HE MARVELLED*, *v.* 6.—Twice we read that Jesus marvelled. First at the wonderful faith of the Roman Centurion (*Luke vii.* 9); and now at the perverse unbelief of the Nazarenes, notwithstanding all they had known of Himself. There is still a continual source of wonder in men's blindness before clear light, and their infatuation in despising divine counsels (*John iii.* 19).

II. The Twelve Apostles sent forth, *vv.* 7-13.—For many weeks the apostles had enjoyed the fellowship of Jesus, in accordance with the *first* object of their call (*iii.* 14). Now the time had come for them to fulfil the *second* object and go forth to preach, endowed by the Master with power to heal (*iii.* 15). This journey was to be a brief trial of their powers before the Master should finally leave them. We note here—

1. *THE ORDER OF GOING FORTH*, *v.* 7.—Two and two, no doubt in the order mentioned by St. Matthew (*x.* 2-4). Divine wisdom provided thus for the mutual support of fellowship. If we knew well the character of those

apostles we would perceive how each one was well suited to the disposition of his special comrade.

2. *THEIR EQUIPMENT*, vv. 8, 9.—A time would come when provision and forethought would be needful (Luke xxii. 35, 36). Meanwhile they were to go as they stood. Neither wallet nor purse nor change of raiment might they take.

In each village or town they were to seek a convenient place of sojourn with some worthy householder (Matth. x. 11) and abide there. This order to travel lightly did not, however, imply asceticism. It meant that their mission must be confined to their own country and race. Hospitality to travellers was universal in Galilee, and especially to teachers of religion. To-day in that same region Moslem preachers go on circuit from village to village under similar conditions. But it also contained an injunction to give themselves to their proper calling instead of wandering idly from house to house (v. 10).

3. *THEIR COMMISSION*, vv. 12, 13.—Their message was an echo of that of their Master (i. 14, 15). We read, they “preached that men should repent.” And no doubt they added the assurance of pardon and the announcement of the kingdom of heaven at hand. That preaching was enforced by miracles of mercy. The anointing here mentioned was a common means of cure and would prove a help to faith (James, v. 14).

4. *THE RESPONSIBILITY OF HEARERS*, v. 11.—The apostles carried a blessing with them. Those who rejected it must bear their own burden, and in token thereof the Apostles were commanded to shake off the dust from their feet against scornful hearers.

Let us remember that their mission was temporary. Things are very different to-day. It is not one call or two that an obstinate soul receives from Christ. Seldom, if ever, can we conceive such dust-shaking now warranted.

The Lord is longsuffering to us-ward (2 Peter iii. 9). But all the more does responsibility remain upon those who persist in rejecting Him.

III. **The Murder of the Baptist**, vv. 14-29.—

The apostles' present mission was brief. But it brought the name and fame of their Master into greater prominence, so that various conjectures arose regarding Him, (*zv. 15, 16*). Herod Antipas, king of Galilee, commonly styled "tetrarch" (*i.e.* ruler of a fourth part of his father's kingdom), was filled with dismay. We read in a former lesson that John was put in prison (*i. 14*). During the previous year, while Jesus preached and wrought miracles in Galilee, the great Forerunner had languished in Herod's gloomy stronghold at Machærus, near the Dead Sea. This Herod, son of Herod the Great, had married Herodias, his niece, and the wife of his brother Philip. He had also parted from his own lawful wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia. Those crimes John had condemned boldly to the king's face (*v. 18*), and for his faithfulness had been imprisoned.

Herodias, a wicked and unscrupulous woman, the Jezebel of the New Testament, had a "quarrel," *i.e.* a grudge, against John, and sought to kill him. But Herod dared not. Conscience told him John was right. Moreover, the great prophet's character had won his admiration (*v. 20*).

So Herod strove to satisfy his conscience by holding John in reverence, "observing," *i.e.* preserving him from harm, and "doing many things," by his counsel, while he still persisted in his sinful life. A weak man's compromise, futile for any good result. Meanwhile we see how Herodias, vengeful and convinced that her safety lay in putting John to silence, bided her time. Then we read of the birthday feast to the "lords, high captains, and chief estates" (*i.e.* chief men) of Galilee" (*v. 21*). This was the "convenient day" evidently prepared for by the queen. We see Salome, the daughter of Herodias and Philip, enter the banqueting hall after supper and perform a scenic dance before the company, a degrading thing for a princess to do; yet Herod only applauds, and in drunken enthusiasm utters his rash and lavish promise (*v. 23*). Now was the opportunity of the vindictive Herodias. Like daughter, like mother. A hurried private

consultation, and "straightway" the young girl hastens back to the banqueting hall with the grim and horrible demand, "I will that thou give me by and by [*i.e.* immediately], in a charger [*i.e.* dish], the head of John the Baptist" (v. 25). Underneath the glitter of oriental splendour the savage appears unabashed. Herod is "exceeding sorry," a strong expression used also of the rich young ruler (Luke xviii. 23), but, as in that case, so here, the sorrow is too weak to cause him to do right. A false shame overcomes him lest he be scorned by his courtiers for scruples about such a trifle as this preacher's life; and "immediately" one of the king's guards is sent to the dungeon and the evil pledge is redeemed (v. 28). One more, a great one, is added to the noble army of martyrs, and one more to Herod's black record of crimes. Thus it was that when Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, a pang of superstitious dismay seized him, unbeliever though he was, and he exclaimed "John, whom I beheaded, he is risen." It is not the first time nor the last that the extremes of unbelief and superstition have met in one weak selfish heart.

LESSON XIV

THE YEAR OF OPPOSITION—JESUS RETIRES TO THE
DESERT—FEEDS THE FIVE THOUSAND—WALKS
ON THE SEA—HEALS MANY

Chap. vi. 30-56

WE now approach the third and last year of our Lord's earthly ministry, known as **The year of opposition.** It began in spring of 29 A.D., the season of the Passover. From this date until the following spring, when His time was fulfilled, the enemies of Jesus increased in numbers and malice. He found it needful to

live much in retired places. He looked forward steadfastly to His own death. His labours were mainly directed to preparing the Apostles for their future mission.

I. Retirement to a desert place, vv. 30-34.—At this time two companies seem to have gathered round Jesus at Capernaum. First, the twelve apostles returned from their brief mission in Galilee, fatigued but elated, with a report of “what they had done and what they had taught” (v. 30). The disciples of the Baptist also came (Matt. xiv. 12), with the sad tidings of their master’s death. It was a solemn premonition of another death ere long to be accomplished at Jerusalem. But that hour was not yet come. Meanwhile, in tender consideration for the apostles, and under the depression caused by the news of his friend’s murder, we see Jesus again withdraw from the crowds at Capernaum and seek retirement in the lonely region across the lake, near Bethsaida Julias, a town recently enlarged by Herod Philip and named after Julia, daughter of the Emperor. But once more He was baffled in the hope of repose. On nearing the north-eastern shore the crowd were found awaiting Him, having journeyed round the northern end of the lake on foot (v. 33).

How did the Lord regard this importunate multitude? Not with impatience at being so beset, but with compassion. They were “as sheep not having a shepherd.” As He came forth from the boat He saw before Him an ignorant, helpless crowd, some anxious to learn the truth, some idly curious, but all needing guidance and care and the knowledge of God that their priests and scribes would never impart. So the time intended for rest is given up to teaching them “many things” (v. 34).

The compassion of Jesus for all sufferers is great; but for none more than for the spiritually destitute. For these He was ready to sacrifice in great things and in small; and He has called His followers to “make up that which is behind of His afflictions” (Col. i. 24).

II. The five thousand fed, vv. 35-44.—The divine

compassion that fed the souls of the multitude cared also for their bodies. This miracle is the only one recorded by all the four evangelists. In St. Mark's account of it we note :—

1. *THE PEOPLE'S NEED*.—In the hurry of pursuit they had omitted to bring food. The day was now far spent, and it was evident that they were in no condition to return home fasting.

2. *THE APOSTLES' SUGGESTION*, *v.* 36.—According to St. John (*vi.* 5), our Lord Himself first drew attention to the lack of food by a question to Philip. In any case the disciples desired to have the multitude sent away to buy food in the neighbourhood ; and when this was forbidden (*v.* 37), they inquired if they should expend two hundred pence (about £7 : 1 : 8), from their modest purse in bread, so as to give each one a little. In those suggestions there is a certain degree of common sense and charity, but very imperfect faith. They were willing to spend their money and make the best of a difficult situation. They did not reflect that He who had led them into it “knew what He would do” (*John vi.* 6).

3. *THE LORD'S PROVISION*, *vv.* 38-44.—He called upon the apostles and the multitude to do their part ; but it must be in faith and obedience. The little store of food must be surrendered,—five barley cakes and two small fishes, hardly a meal for one man.—The multitude must seat themselves in groups upon the fresh spring grass. Soon they were duly ranged “by hundreds, and by fifties,” *i.e.* perhaps in twenty groups of 250 each ; each group in horse-shoe form, having two sides numbering 100 persons, and one of 50, the fourth being left open.

Then the food was held up before God, and blessed, and divided ; and, behold, as each company received their portion from the hands of the disciples, it was multiplied until all were fed. It is idle to inquire at what point or in what manner the increase took place. Twelve baskets were filled with the fragments. The spiritual infer-

ence is here very obvious. The Lord seeks to feed all men with the Bread of life, *i.e.* the grace that nourishes the soul. But He does this in His own way, not by modes of man's devising. He employs first His ordained servants and next those to whom they have ministered. He calls upon all to obey His directions and to surrender to Him such gifts as they possess. Under these conditions success is assured. In such willing service the most meagre gifts are increased. There is abundant light and blessing for all. Yet He permits no gift to be wasted.

III. Jesus walks on the water, *vv.* 45-52.—Not long were the multitude permitted to linger over their meal. "Straightway" Jesus constrained the apostles to enter their vessel and set sail from near Bethsaida Julias for Bethsaida of Galilee, a fishing village to the north of Capernaum, the native place of Andrew, Simon Peter, and Philip.

Then He bade the crowd hasten homewards and Himself retired to the high ground above the lake to refresh His soul in the divine fellowship of private prayer. In St. Mark's narrative we note—

1. *THE DISCIPLES IN DIFFICULTIES, vv. 47, 48.*—They had set forth at evening, the second period so named by the Jews,—the first beginning at our 3 p.m., this one at sunset. From the mountain side Jesus could descry the boat tossing hour after hour on the billows in face of a strong headwind, the disciples toiling to keep her stem to the blast. An emblem to-day of His true Church buffeted by the tempests of this world, while His faithful servants strive to hold on their course, and their exalted Lord "ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25). "He saw them toiling" (*v.* 48); and He sees them now, although now, as then, they are apt to forget the fact.

2. *THE DISCIPLES STARTLED, vv. 48, 49.*—Nine hours had passed. Little more than half the voyage was accomplished. About the fourth watch, *i.e.* three in the morning, the wearied crew perceived their Master walking on the waves. How the miracle was achieved we

cannot tell. Conjectures are idle and presumptuous. By that act He again asserted His lordship over outward nature. In the spirit He still comes to walk on the billows of this troubled world and help His servants in distress. The disciples, superstitious fishermen as they were, mistook Him for an apparition or ghost and cried out in terror. Even now the Lord's disciples, without those men's excuse, are too often more scared than comforted by unusual tokens of His presence.

3. *THE DISCIPLES REASSURED*, v. 50.—Their terror showed the weakness of their faith. But Jesus ever sought to strengthen the feeble (Isa. xxv. 4). "Straightway" the sound of His well-known voice allayed the disciples' panic. As soon as they realised that it was He, confidence returned, and they received Him with joy into the ship. Yet even now the dulness of their spiritual life appeared. "They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure" (v. 51), "their heart was hardened" (v. 52). They had ceased to tremble; they even acknowledged Him to be the Son of God (Matt. xiv. 33); but their slow intelligence left them still in blank amazement at the wonder they had seen, instead of remembering the former wonders wrought but a few hours ago in their presence. The same dull spirit still affects the Church. We may not now behold physical marvels as in Galilee long ago; but when the Lord shows His gracious power in some merciful act of Providence or in some striking work of the Spirit, too often His servants are amazed far "beyond measure." If we bear in mind Him with whom we have to do, while we must stand in reverent wonder at the "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. xi. 33), we shall cease to marvel "beyond measure" that His promises have been "yea" and "Amen" (2 Cor. i. 20).

IV. *In the land of Gennesaret*, vv. 53-56.—The storm had driven the boat southward from its course, so that instead of landing at Bethsaida of Galilee, the Lord and His disciples found themselves at Gennesaret—a fair and fertile plain about three miles in length by one in

breadth. Here again crowds assembled around the great Healer. For some days, as far as we can gather from the context, Jesus traversed that region, and in every village and town such numbers came to receive succour that the laying on of His hands was no longer possible. But faith, not personal contact, was the condition of healing. The request to be allowed to touch the hem of His robe sufficed to prove that humility and trust were there. And with these His lovingkindness had free course (*v.* 56). So is it still in the blessings of the soul.

LESSON XV

HOSTILE JEWS AND BELIEVING GENTILES— RETIREMENT TO NORTHERN GALILEE

Chap. vii.

AT the close of last lesson we saw our Lord among the villages of Gennesaret engaged day by day in works of mercy. About that time He visited Capernaum and in the synagogue spake His great discourse on "The Bread of Life," with the result that many were offended in Him (*John vi. 60-66*).

Meanwhile the Scribes and Pharisees had taken counsel together at Jerusalem, while attending the Pass-over feast, and now at its close a strong body of them appeared in Galilee to watch Jesus and, if possible, to entrap Him.

The year of opposition has begun to run its course.

I. Hostile Jews, *vv.* 1-23.

1. DISPUTE ABOUT TRADITIONAL OBSERVANCES, *vv.* 1-13.—The scribes found fault because they saw some of the disciples eat bread with "common"—that is, unwashen, hands. Their zeal, however, was not for cleanliness but for ceremony. St. Mark, evidently writing for

Gentile readers, explains how the Jews eat not except they wash their hands "oft"—literally "with the fist"—a phrase denoting energy. He goes on to enumerate other objects of ceremonial washing, including "pots"—the Roman *sextarius* containing a pint and a half—and "tables," more properly *couches* on which to recline at table.

All those washings were prescribed by "the tradition of the elders," which consisted of a mass of oral commentary on the Law of Moses, accumulated, like the decisions of our law courts, through many generations, and containing the application of the law by learned scribes to every detail of life.

In the present case the ceremonial washings were enjoined to an extent that was needless and irksome. The bad spirit in which the scribes had put their question is shown by the stern tone of our Lord's reply (*vv.* 6-13). He roundly charges them with hypocrisy of the worst kind. They were formalists such as the prophet Isaiah had described their fathers to be, whose measure of iniquity they now filled up (*Isa.* xxix. 13).

In scornful irony—probably the most sarcastic utterance recorded of our Lord—He declares "Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (*v.* 9). And in proof thereof He cites their unscrupulous evasion of the fifth commandment (*Exodus* xx. 12 ; *xxi.* 17).

Filial duty, especially towards aged and helpless parents, is of the very essence of the law—the first application of the second great commandment. Yet the scribes taught that if a Jew declared any property to be "corban" dedicated to God, he was exempted from applying it to the support of his parents, even though they had to suffer want in consequence. The offering was supposed to be inalienably devoted to the temple treasury, as if the maintenance of parents were not a prior obligation.

Such tampering with plain duty the Lord condemns as making the word of God of none effect by ecclesiastical

tradition (*vv.* 12, 13); and his censure falls, not upon the people, but first upon the scribes who dared thus to lead them astray. No amount of church contributions can justify an unkind son or a hard master.

2. *THE PEOPLE WARNED*, *vv.* 14-23.—Jesus now comes out to the highway, and, still full of the subject, calls the multitude around Him and lays down, in a broad and emphatic manner, the principle involved. Real defilement, He declares, has its source in the heart. Whatever corrupt influences may beset a man, as long as the heart is kept pure, the man remains undefiled (*Prov.* iv. 23). Returning to the house the puzzled disciples asked for further explanation of this “parable.”

Jesus reproves their lack of understanding and repeats His saying in enlarged form (*vv.* 18-23). By some expounders of this passage our Lord is held to abolish the Levitical distinction between clean meat and unclean; forecasting here the vision of Simon Peter at Joppa (*Acts* x. 10-15). Whether we draw that inference from His words or not, their direct purpose is to enforce the truth that nothing external, such as food, can truly defile a man. He only is defiled who suffers the “evil thoughts” that assail him to contaminate his heart; and the black catalogue that follows (*v.* 22) shows how terrible that defilement may become (*Gal.* v. 19-21).

II. Believing Gentiles, *vv.* 24-37.—So incensed were the scribes and Pharisees by the severe chastisement inflicted upon them that Jesus now found it needful to seek safety by abandoning His former haunts in Galilee. Two striking incidents of this period, as recorded by St. Mark, foreshadow the time when gospel blessings rejected by God’s chosen people would be welcomed and cherished by the Gentiles.

1. *THE SYRO-PHŒNICIAN WOMAN*, *vv.* 24-30.—Our Lord’s first journey was north-westwards through Upper Galilee to the borders of Phœnicia near its great commercial cities, Tyre and Sidon. Here His fame had preceded Him (*iii.* 8). The spot at which He sojourned is unknown. But His attempt to secure rest

and retirement for the quiet instruction of the twelve was quickly baffled. As long as men and women had wants to relieve "He could not be hid" (v. 25). Here we note—

a. The Suppliant.—St. Matthew calls her "A woman of Canaan," one of the aborigines of the Holy Land, a despised race. In religion she was a "Greek" or heathen; by nationality an inhabitant of Syro-Phœnicia, as distinguished from Libyan Phœnicia in Africa. Both her race and religion were serious obstacles in claiming benefits from "the Son of David."

But a mother's love set obstacles aside. Her child had become the innocent victim of demoniacal possession, and the mother, having heard of the power and compassion of Jesus, now appealed to His loving humanity with earnest entreaties for help. Neither by silence nor by discouraging speech would she be stayed (Matt. xv. 23, 24). And when at last the Lord declared "Let the children first be filled; for it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs"—lit., the little house-dogs, as distinguished from the stray dogs outside—the woman's undaunted faith in His goodness caught at the ray of comfort in the first part of the answer, and her ready wit found a rejoinder to the second, "Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs" (v. 28). We remember Luther's much quoted comment, "See, was not that a master-stroke? She snares Christ in His own words."

b. The Saviour.—By His treatment of this suppliant Jesus fulfilled a threefold purpose. 1. He proclaimed that His mission was "To the Jew first and also to the Greek." The gospel does not ignore the distinction between Jew and Gentile. It supersedes it by a larger fellowship. 2. He tested and developed the Gentile woman's faith in His power and compassion. 3. By granting her request He honoured the woman's love and the loyal spirit that refused to lose heart notwithstanding the ordeal to which she had been subjected.

In spite of her race and native religion Jesus acknow-

ledged her as a true daughter of Abraham. No more touching instance of triumphant faith in the personal Christ is on record than that of the poor woman of Canaan with her steadfast, loving heart and ready tongue.

2. *THE DEAF MUTE OF DECAPOLIS*, vv. 31-37.—Our Lord did not tarry long in Phœnicia. According to the Revised Version, "Again He went out from the borders of Tyre, and came through Sidon" (v. 31), the city of Baal and Astarte: His course therefore still lay northwards at first; then turning eastwards and crossing the sources of the Jordan, He travelled south till He reached the "coasts" (*i.e.* region) of Decapolis, a district of ten cities situated to the east of the Sea of Galilee.

The people of Decapolis were for the most part heathen. They had once besought Him to depart out of their coasts. (v. 17). But since then, owing to the testimony of the cured demoniac (v. 20) and others, His works of grace had become well known. They therefore received Him gladly and witnessed many tokens of His compassion. In the single case recorded by St. Mark we note—

a. *The considerate tenderness of our Lord*, vv. 32-35.—They brought to Him a deaf man who could hardly speak. To quicken the man's faith and expectation Jesus took him aside from the crowd, and touched His ears and His tongue in token of the blessing He desired to bestow. Then He looked up to heaven in prayer (cf. John xi. 41, 42). He sighed, in profound pity for the sufferings of mankind, whereof this was an example. We cannot accept the idea that Jesus sighed at the thought of letting loose one more "unruly member" to misuse the gift of speech. Finally, in the Aramaic dialect of the people He spake the one word "Ephphatha (be opened)," and the cure was wrought (v. 35). Here, as in the case of the paralytic (ch. ii. 5), the power of the Lord met the faith of the sufferer and his friends.

b. *The Heedless Enthusiasm of the People*, vv. 36, 37.—The Lord's charge to tell no man was no affected

or idle command. He needed retirement. His safety, too, was concerned in securing a season of quiet. But the excitement of the people could take no account of these things. It is for Christ's servants to remember that while enthusiasm is good, obedience is better, and the former without the latter loses its claim to respect.

LESSON XVI

FEEDING FOUR THOUSAND—IN DALMANUTHA—THE
LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES—THE BLIND MAN
OF BETHSAIDA JULIAS

Chap. viii

THE exact term of our Lord's sojourn in Decapolis is not known. It was a time of popular excitement, a crowd following Him and the apostles from place to place, hanging on His words and experiencing His healing power.

I. Four Thousand Fed, *vv.* 1-9.—Before that visit to Decapolis closed an occasion arose such as we considered in *vi.* 33.

The multitude "being very great" found themselves in a lonely place far from dwellings, with their provisions exhausted. Many of them had been out with Jesus for three days.

The miracle of relief that follows is in all its main features a repetition of the former one. We note the respective numbers of the multitudes, and of the loaves and fishes available; and the different sizes of basket used to collect fragments, *viz.*, in the former case, small wicker hand-baskets (*kophinoi*); in the latter, large creels (*spurides*). But such differences of detail only serve to distinguish the occasions.

We may further observe, however: 1, *THE FORGETFULNESS OF THE APOSTLES*.—Even after Jesus had expressed

His concern for the hungry multitude (*v.* 2), none of the twelve seems to have recalled the recent miracle wrought near that same spot and in precisely similar circumstances. Dr. Trench well points out how the same forgetfulness marked their fathers of old in the wilderness, where each new difficulty only served to arouse murmurs, notwithstanding the repeated marvels of deliverance which Israel beheld (*Ex.* xvii. 1-7 ; *Numb.* xi. 22, 23). And the same dullness besets weak human nature still. We experience great mercies and relief from trouble ; yet how apt we are to behave on the next occasion as if no such blessings had been ours.

2. The former miracle relieved a Jewish multitude from Galilee ; this one, a Gentile multitude from Decapolis. In both the Apostles were employed to dispense the miraculous gift of food. Surely we may recognise here a symbol of their mission to break the bread of life to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

In both miracles we perceive the same divine compassion. Both forbid waste. Both teach us the all-sufficiency of the Master for every need, and the spirit of faith and love in which He desires His blessings to be distributed from man to man.

II. In Dalmanutha, *vv.* 10-13.—After the miracle of feeding, Jesus with the twelve “straightway” crossed the lake and landed near “Dalmanutha,” a village between the towns of Magdala and Tiberias. The Pharisees—accompanied, St. Matthew mentions, by their new allies the Herodians—quickly found Him out, and, eager to cause trouble, began their attack by demanding “a sign from heaven” (*v.* 11).

This was not the first time the challenge had been given (*Matt.* xii. 38 ; *John* ii. 18, vi. 30). The “sign” they asked for was some conspicuous token of power over nature, such as had been wrought by Moses, Joshua, and Elijah. They paid no heed to the wonders of compassion and healing that had taken place in their midst. Their evil hearts of unbelief did not desire light or reason for conviction. They saw that since His last sojourn in

Galilee (vii. 1-23), the confidence of the people in Jesus had decreased. And they hoped that by trying Him with demands that He could not or would not meet, they might destroy His influence altogether. Such hardened hostility met with an emphatic refusal—lit., “if a sign shall be given to this generation,” the strongest form of denial possible (v. 12). But in refusing the demand “He sighed deeply in His spirit.” Why? Not only in weary sorrow at men’s obstinate perverseness, but because He knew that the refusal would ensure His final rejection by the leaders of the nation. It brought the cross very near. The die was cast. Galilee through its rulers had refused to acknowledge the Messiah. So He left them and sought present safety by crossing the lake.

III. **The Leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod,** *vv. 14-21.*

1. *THE LORD’S WARNING, v. 15.*—In the boat, as He reflected on the scene just past, Jesus solemnly charged the apostles “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.” The self-righteous formalism of the one, the unbelief of the other, the prejudice and pride of both, were spiritual evils always at work in countless forms in the world. It is worth observing that in Holy Scripture the figure of leaven is most frequently used to represent bad influence (1 Cor. v. 7, 8). Like leaven those insidious powers of formalism and unbelief would pervade the souls where they once obtained an entrance and would work ruin. Therefore, the Master bade His followers take heed; and it is a warning the servants of Christ can never venture to disregard.

2. *THE APOSTLES’ ERROR, v. 16.*—With childish misconception they imagined that Jesus meant to forbid the purchase of bread, especially leavened bread, from His recent adversaries. They remembered that in their haste they had forgotten to replenish their store, and in uneasy concern they whispered to one another “we have no bread.”

3. *THE LORD’S REPROOF, vv. 17-21.*—Its tone of

reproach shows how unworthy He considered this dullness of apprehension. Their hearts might still be loyal, but their progress in understanding came lamentably short of what was right.

After the two miracles of feeding they had witnessed, —both here cited in detail,—and the many counsels of spiritual wisdom they had heard, were their spiritual perceptions still so dense as to imagine the solemn warning now uttered merely to refer to provisions? Could they not yet trust Him in the matter of food, and look for a deeper meaning in His grave counsel to “Take heed”? The shallow obtuseness of disciples has never ceased to hurt the cause of Christ. In personal religion and in corporate church life, the small, the visible, the temporal, are continually being substituted for great spiritual truths. Every day might the Lord still put the question “How is it that ye do not understand?”

IV. The Blind Man of Bethsaida Julias, *vv.* 22-26.—From the eastern shore of the lake the Lord and His Apostles ascended to Bethsaida, the town lately enlarged by Herod Philip (Luke ix. 10). The miracle now wrought is recorded by St. Mark only. It is notable among miracles for the gradual manner in which the blind man’s sight was restored. It is evident that he was not born blind. As in the case of the deaf mute of Decapolis, this sufferer was brought to Jesus by friends. And Jesus, in order to help and quicken faith, took him apart, anointed his eyes with saliva, and encouraged him to try to use them. At the first effort there is a cry of delight “I see men”: then he adds a qualification, “for I behold them as trees, walking” (*v.* 24, R. V.). Another touch of power, another call to effort, another response of faith, and the cure was complete (*v.* 25). From the quiet spot outside the town Jesus sent the man to his home in some neighbouring village with strict injunctions to remain in retirement.

The parable contained in this miracle is plain and very beautiful. We learn how spiritual vision is restored.

1. From first to last it is by fellowship with Jesus

Christ. Without His tender touch of healing power there is no cure.

2. There is a critical moment at which the darkness is broken. It is when faith first responds, however faintly, to the Spirit's prompting. The measure of light received at that moment must vary in different cases, but in all regeneration there must needs be an initial point ; and at that point it is instantaneous.

3. The subsequent progress is gradual. For a time the regenerate soul sees but dimly at best. Many stumbles and mistakes occur. There is perplexity, uneasiness, and doubt. Men appear like trees, and trees like men. But in touch with Jesus Christ, the illumination goes on. The Holy Spirit takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them with increasing clearness, until spiritual vision is mature and objects appear in just proportion.

And this progress is an earnest and pledge of the day of the Lord, when "He which hath begun a good work" shall have performed it, and His Redeemed shall see with undimmed vision like His own.

LESSON XVII

IN CÆSAREA PHILIPPI—PETER'S GREAT CONFESSION —THE CROSS PROCLAIMED

Chap. viii. 27—ix. 1

AFTER the miracle at Bethsaida Julius Jesus led the apostles northwards for upwards of twenty-five miles along the eastern side of the Jordan till they reached the "towns," or villages, round Cæsarea Philippi.

The city thus named stood on a terrace under Mount Hermon, close to the upper or eastern fountainhead of Jordan and not far from Dan, the northern extremity of the Holy Land. It was an old heathen sanctuary con-

nected with the worship of Baal and of the rural god Pan, whence it was known as "Paneas." To-day the ruined city on the same site is called Banias; but, at the time of our Lord, Herod Philip the tetrarch had lately rebuilt it with great splendour and named it Cæsarea Philippi in honour of the Emperor (Tiberius Cæsar) and himself. It is to be distinguished from Cæsarea on the sea, where, some thirty years later, Paul was detained a prisoner (Acts xxiii. 33).

In that remote region Jesus now found safety for a season. We see Him make use of this quiet time in order to prepare the minds of the apostles for coming trials.

I. Two Questions, vv. 27-29.—After the prayer of preparation that marked every important crisis of His life (Luke ix. 18), Jesus, as they walked in the way, addressed to the disciples the question, "Whom do men say that I am?" This inquiry brought home to them the fact of His rejection in Galilee. There were many minds there regarding Jesus. Some, like Herod, declared that John the Baptist had risen from the dead; others that the great Elijah had descended to earth; others again pronounced Him to be Jeremiah or, at least, one of the old Hebrew prophets (Matt. xvi. 14). But none acknowledged Him to be the Messiah. That belief had prevailed in Galilee when His popularity was at its height. But the influence of the Scribes and the lack of the "signs" they demanded had destroyed it.

The second question, therefore, was a critical test of faith. "But whom say ye that I am?" (v. 29).

II. Peter's Great Confession, "Thou art the Christ," v. 29; St. Matthew adds "the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16). But the briefer form here implies the other (cf. ch. i. 1). This was not the first time that similar testimony had been given. (John i. 49; John vi. 69). But the present confession was deliberate and formal in answer to a solemn question, and made in the presence of the twelve apostles by Peter as their spokesman.

It marks, therefore, the occasion when the future founders of the Christian Church formally accepted their Master as Messiah and Lord. St. Mark omits the striking eulogium on Simon son of Jonas that followed (Matt. xvi. 17-19).

On the assumption that Mark wrote this Gospel record under Simon Peter's eye, that omission, together with the insertion of the subsequent reproof (v. 33), at once testifies to the Christian modesty of the great apostle and forbids the idea that on this occasion a primacy was conferred upon him and his successors by the Lord, in the future constitution of the Church. So important a pronouncement would have been left out by no recorder, nor would any personal humility have warranted its omission.

The Lord's charge to "tell no man" (v. 30) was doubtless a counsel of prudence. His time was unfulfilled, and, moreover, the knowledge and understanding of the apostles were still too limited to enable them to proclaim Him as the Messiah, with good effect.

III. The Cross announced for Master and Disciples, vv. 31-38.—We have in this passage—

1. *THE LORD'S INTIMATION OF HIS DEATH, v. 31.*—Having braced the souls of the apostles by bringing out the confession of their faith, Jesus now made a further demand upon it. In spite of His rejection in Galilee, they believed Him to be the Messiah. They must now learn to believe in a Messiah not only rejected, but suffering "many things" and put to death.

The announcement of His resurrection "after three days" would in time be a precious memory to reflect upon. Meanwhile it was eclipsed by the nearer prospect of the grave.

We note that Jesus spake that saying *openly* or *plainly*. Once and again He had referred to His coming death (ii. 20, John iii. 14-16, vi. 51). But those hints and allusions now gave place to a clear, unmistakable intimation. "The Son of Man must suffer—and be killed."

2. *PETER'S REMONSTRANCE*, v. 32.—To the apostles the idea of Messiah being put to death was shocking. They could not accept it. With characteristic impetuosity, Simon Peter sought to dispel the notion by representing it as a wild impossibility, probably caused by temporary depression.

3. *A STERN REBUKE*, v. 33.—The manner in which Jesus, abruptly turning from Peter, reproved him in presence of the apostles is full of instruction.

It shows how, in the human nature of Jesus, a shrinking from pain and death gave subtle force to Peter's words.

The severity of the reproof shows the reality of the temptation. It is in principle a repetition of the trial in the wilderness (i. 13). Simon, son of Jonas, the chosen friend, Peter the rock-man, on whose labours the Church would be built, is of a sudden denounced as "Satan," the adversary, because, in ignorant presumption, he is doing Satan's work and seeking to turn the Redeemer from the way of the cross.

"Thou savourest" is lit. "mindest only" the things of men. The "*must* suffer" just spoken by the Lord (v. 31), meant, in the view of Peter, but a human probability to be averted by suitable means. To the mind of Jesus it was a necessity of divine truth and love, without which the world's redemption could not be accomplished.

Let all, who think of a gospel of salvation without an atoning sacrifice offered and believed in, learn here the gravity of their error.

4. *THE DISCIPLES' CROSS*, v. 34.—Here as in vii. 14, Jesus, about to declare a broad and far-reaching principle, called the crowd to Him. Even in that remote region the prophet of Galilee was followed by many anxious to see and hear.

And what was the weighty truth now to be taught? No popular and palatable doctrine, but "Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." There is a cross for the disciple as well as for his Lord. And we note that this is the

first mention of *the cross* in St. Mark's gospel. For the Master, the cross meant a cruel death borne willingly as a ransom on behalf of sinful men; for His disciples, it means suffering endured, not indeed with like purpose,—Jesus stands alone by the altar of sin-offering,—but in the same spirit of love and obedience.

To take up the cross does not merely consist in bearing unavoidable trials with resignation, but in doing painful duties and in denying self for Christ's sake when an easier course is possible.

5. *THE REASONS FOR THIS RULE*, vv. 35, 36.—There is a lower life of self-pleasing and a higher life of Christian discipleship. In one form or another all must choose between them. We do not require to be Christian martyrs of the heroic type in order to fulfil Christ's word. Note that in verse 35 "will save" is not a future tense, but signifies "is willing to save." Note also that the terms "life" (v. 35), and "soul" (vv. 36, 37), are identical.

Let a man "gain the whole world" and satisfy every material taste and ambition, if to do this he neglects his spiritual life and forfeits his highest and eternal well-being, what doth it profit? He has made a very bad bargain. And he has nothing of his own wherewith to buy back a wasted life.

Thank God, as long as he is spared on earth there is a way of redemption still left. By penitence and faith he can avail himself of the merits of his Redeemer as the ransom price of his lost soul.

6. *A WORD OF WARNING*, v. 38.—The present generation Jesus termed "adulterous," because its spirit was unfaithful to God. But in every age there is a generation of worldly-minded persons who despise the Gospel and tempt young souls, in particular, to be ashamed of their high calling.

For all so tempted the Lord utters a warning. He points forward to the day when He shall appear as the Judge of mankind in all the glory of the Father's kingdom, and those weak souls who have here yielded to

ridicule and scorn shall be put to shame before Him. We mark that their ultimate fate is not revealed. They are unworthy disciples, guilty of miserable conduct, but they are not rebels or hypocritical followers to whom He shall say "I never knew you, depart from Me." Therefore we must not conclude that "to be ashamed" of such, even in the judgment, means to cast them out.

7. *A STRIKING ANNOUNCEMENT*, ix. 1.—This verse is manifestly, as in Matt. xvi. 28, attached to the foregoing passage. It points to several events. In the Transfiguration soon to occur, in the Resurrection from the dead on the third day, in the marvel on the day of Pentecost, and in the destruction of Jerusalem, some of those standing there would behold a manifestation of the kingdom of God with power. It would be an earnest of the great day just foretold, when the Son of Man should come to judgment in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

LESSON XVIII

THE TRANSFIGURATION—THE EPILEPTIC DEMONIAC HEALED

Chap. ix. 2-29

In the discourse just considered, the Lord had announced in plain terms His approaching passion, and laid down for the disciples the principle of "no cross, no crown." In closing He had promised for their encouragement that some of those who heard Him should obtain, even in this life, a glimpse of the glory to follow. That promise, we know, received several fulfilments. The first of these was

I. *The Transfiguration*, vv. 2-8.

1. *THE TIME, PLACE, AND CIRCUMSTANCES*, v. 2.—"After six days" St. Luke mentions (ix. 28) "about an eight days after these sayings," including the day

on which the discourse was spoken and that on which the Transfiguration occurred.

The "high mountain" was once supposed to be Mount Tabor in Galilee, but it is now generally believed to be Hermon, the height which dominates all that region. It stands 10,000 feet high, and closes the northern view from all parts of Palestine. It was once named Sirion (Deut. iii. 9) or *the breast-plate*, from its shining, snow-clad summit, and to-day it is known as Jebel-esh-sheikh (the chief mountain).

To some wooded spur or shoulder of that great mountain Jesus now repaired to pray (Luke ix. 28), probably after sunset, as was His custom. He took with Him Peter and James and John, His three chosen friends from among the twelve (v. 37 ; xiv. 33).

2. *THE VISION*, vv. 2-4.—While Jesus prayed, the three apostles slept (Luke ix. 32). Suddenly they awoke to find a marvellous spectacle. Their Master stood in transfigured splendour ; His face shining as the sun (Matt. xvii. 2) ; all trace of care and weariness gone ; His garments white as the snow of Hermon, of a dazzling purity which no fuller, *i.e.* cleanser, on earth could rival. We must remember that this portent was a real transformation, a *metamorphosis* as the Greek text puts it (v. 2). It will not do to ascribe the vision, as has been done, simply to the light of the Lord's pure and exalted spirit "breaking forth from within and overflowing the very garments He wore."

The most spotless spiritual purity could never cause garments to shine "exceeding white as snow." Not from within but from above was that exceeding whiteness, the light of celestial glory in which His people have the promise of sharing (1 Cor. xv. 49).

Beside the Lord were two celestial visitants (v. 4), Moses the law-giver, called back from the sepulchre that "no man knoweth of" (Deut. xxxiv. 6) ; and Elijah, foremost among the prophets, returned to earth from heaven to which, deathless, he had been carried (2 Kings ii. 11). "They were talking with Jesus" (v. 4). "Of

His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31).

The word "decease" means literally "departure," and may be taken here to include the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension.

The representatives of the law and the prophets whereby the Messiah had for ages been prefigured and foretold, now met that Greater One in the days of His humiliation to strengthen Him for the crowning ordeal of His great sacrifice.

Two important truths are brought home to us. (a) The personal identity and visible recognition of the saints of God in the life to come. (b) The supreme importance of the "decease" of Jesus Christ. A saviour without an atoning sacrifice and a resurrection may be conceivable, but he would not be the Redeemer revealed in the Gospel.

3. *THE EFFECT ON THE APOSTLES*, vv. 5, 6.—Their first sensation was one of complete bewilderment and fear. Then Simon Peter, foremost as usual, exclaimed "It is good for us to be here," (v. 5). Peter seems to have hoped that surely the day of the new kingdom was come at last. The proposal to build three "tabernacles," or booths of branches, arose from a desire to prolong this bright vision and the sense of exaltation they now enjoyed. He could appreciate the glory of the transfiguration better than the glory of the sacrifice; Peter had yet to learn that Jesus hanging on the cross between two thieves claims even a deeper reverence than Jesus standing on Hermon between Moses and Elijah.

4. *THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN*, vv. 7-8.—Even as Peter spoke, a glorious shining cloud enveloped them all, and within its bright recesses Moses, Elijah, and Jesus faded from view. Then, as the apostles fell on their faces in terror, the Father's voice was heard proclaiming, as once before at the Baptism in Jordan, "This is my beloved son," and adding the command "Hear him" (v. 7).

Soon the cloud passed away. Looking up, the apostles saw Jesus once more alone. But the marvellous scene just witnessed and the closing words from on high were lasting possessions (cf. 2 Peter i. 16-18).

The Gospel was set, once for all, above the Law and the Prophets that it fulfilled. The apostles and the Church for all time were taught to regard Jesus Christ as the final authority on questions of faith and duty.

II. The Descent from the Mountain, vv. 9-13.

—In this passage we are called to note the Lord's charge to the apostles to tell no man what things they had seen, till after His resurrection (v. 9). Until then they could not understand the vision. Therefore the less they spoke of it meanwhile the better. His words seemed a mystery beyond their comprehension.

In reply to the question "How say the scribes that Elias must first come?" Jesus reminded them that the same Scriptures which foretold Elijah in the person of John the Baptist, foretold also the Messiah's sufferings and death. Elijah indeed had come as it was written, and the ungodly had done to him as they desired. This reference, at least, the apostles understood. Yet though in the same breath the Lord repeated plainly the announcement of His own Passion, they still failed to apprehend it. So obstinate is prejudice. So wonderful the power of misconception even amongst good and honest men.

III. The Epileptic Demoniac cured, vv. 14-29.—

In striking contrast with the vision on the Mount is the scene described in this passage. It was fitted to teach the apostles that, inspiring as are moments of high fellowship and glimpses of future glory, for the present, the labours of the Master and of His followers lay in a world full of suffering, and also of opposition and unbelief. We note here—

I. THE APOSTLES' FAILURE, vv. 17, 18.—It is not clear at what place Jesus and His three companions rejoined the other apostles. But their need of Him was great. We see them in the centre of a crowd, harassed

by the jeering questions of the scribes who had arrived on the scene, and baffled in an attempt to relieve a sufferer. The father of a demoniac deaf mute, whose possession took the form of epileptic seizures, had come with his boy to seek Jesus, and, in His absence, the apostles had endeavoured in vain to exorcise the unclean spirit. Why this failure? The power to cast out devils committed to them (vi. 7) had not been withdrawn. The sufferer was personally innocent. His affliction had begun in childhood (v. 21). The father was not without faith, else he had not come there.

We find the answer in the Lord's sad protest (v. 19), and also in His reply to the question "Why could not we cast Him out?" (vv. 28, 29). The case was an extremely bad one. The hold that the unclean spirit had taken of his victim was strong. And the faith of the apostles had not been sufficiently exercised by prayer to make their powers effective on such an occasion.

The harder the task set before a disciple of Jesus Christ the more need for diligence in personal devotion that the virtue of the Master's presence may rest upon him.

2. *THE FATHER'S FAITH*, vv. 17, 22, 24.—His coming to seek Jesus showed a measure of genuine faith. He was under a deep sense of need, and he believed that Jesus could and would help him. That faith was weakened by the apostles' failure (v. 22). And yet, at the Master's gracious words, faith revived. When convinced that the matter rests now with himself (v. 23), the man's humble and earnest reply, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (v. 24), proves that the root of the matter is in him. His prayer may take rank beside that of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13).

3. *THE LORD'S GRACIOUS RESPONSE*, vv. 25-27.—The weak faith of the apostles, and, probably, the shaken confidence of the father, had brought forth a protest against their slowness of heart (v. 19). But even in rebuking, Jesus bids them bring the sufferer to Him. He

does not at once expel the unclean spirit. He suffers the boy to have two grievous fits in His presence, and as he lies convulsed before Him, He causes the father to describe the nature of the seizures. Why this delay in so sad a case? Because the first care of Jesus was ever for the soul. His words to the father were intended to lead him on to such a degree of trust as would show that the conditions of healing were fulfilled. That point gained, Jesus at once asserts His might, and with stern majesty denounces and expels the demon (*v.* 25). The final paroxysm before the unclean spirit went out, and the dead faint that followed, reveal the severity of the struggle between the Lord of life and the powers of evil. But in the history of many a saved soul there is a painful struggle before grace prevails and deadly influences are removed. Yet the issue is never doubtful. This miracle is one of many that teach us how Jesus honours the intercession of friends. No faith is so effectual as faith that worketh by love.

LESSON XIX

THE RETURN TO CAPERNAUM—THE CHRISTIAN RULE OF PREFERMENT AND OF TOLERANCE—SOME SOLEMN WARNINGS AND COUNSELS

Chap. ix. 30-50

I. The Return Southwards, *vv.* 30-32.

From the region near Cæsarea Philippi Jesus now returned by unfrequented paths through Galilee to Capernaum, His family home. He sought strict privacy for the sake of safety and also because time was passing, and He still strove to convince His followers of His approaching death and resurrection. For the second time (*viii.* 32) we read that, laying aside hints and allusions, He "taught," *lit.* "kept teaching," them this truth in plain terms,

(v. 31). But so rooted in their minds were dreams of worldly dignity that still even the Apostles failed to understand Him.

They "were afraid to ask Him," v. 32: perhaps they had a lurking fear that His explanation might prove unwelcome.

II. **In Capernaum**, vv. 33-50.—St. Matthew relates at this point the incident of the tribute money (Matt. xvii. 24-27), which St. Mark omits. In our Gospel we note here—

I. *THE CHRISTIAN RULE OF PREFERMENT*, vv. 33-37.—Looking back we see that for some days the situation has been full of pathos. We see the Lord steadfastly journeying onwards and from time to time discoursing, as one under a burden, upon the awful and momentous trials before Him; His heart no doubt craving for a little sympathy, but in vain. The disciples listen in awkward silence. Then, as soon as they fancy themselves out of hearing, they fall to disputing which of them is the greatest and entitled to the highest place in the new kingdom soon to be founded. It is evident that they ascribed no primacy to Simon Peter.

No wonder they felt shame when, on reaching "the house" (v. 33), the Master let them understand that their selfish and foolish talk had been overheard. But now Jesus lays aside His own feelings. The disciples' dispute has revealed their immediate need. Seating Himself as a Teacher with a solemn truth to impart, He summons the twelve to receive it.

"If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (v. 35).

At first sight those words seem to lay a penalty upon ambition. In point of fact they do not deal with ambition directly. The man of selfish ambition may in a sense be considered last of all because in Christ's kingdom he is of no account; but that is not the truth here unfolded. The Lord here teaches the way to eminence in His kingdom. It is by humility and service. He who humbleth himself shall be exalted. This doctrine

was soon to be more fully laid down (x. 43, 44). Meanwhile the Master illustrates it in a striking manner to the disciples.

He sets a little child in their midst and points to him as an example of the character God approves, not selfish and ambitious, but simple, teachable, trustful.

Then He takes the child into His embrace as a token of the kindly treatment God seeks His servants to accord to such simple ones. Selfish ambition will hold them cheap. But he who receives and ministers to them for Christ's sake thereby serves the Lord Himself, and through Him the Father that sent Him. By such conduct he proves himself to be of the Master's spirit, and therefore fitted to hold a high place in His kingdom.

2. *THE LAW OF TOLERANCE*, vv. 38-40.—Struck by the rule of charity thus proclaimed, St. John now remembered with misgiving how he and his brethren had recently prohibited a certain man from casting out devils in the name of Jesus. Why? Not because of the man's ignorance, or lack of reverence for the Master, but because he was not of their own band of disciples. The apostle mentions the circumstance as if asking the Lord's view of it.

In the reply "Forbid him not" Jesus condemns all such prohibitions.

The success of the man's labours in the name of Christ was a proof not only of his gifts but of his genuineness. Such a labourer might be trusted not to speak evil readily of the Master whom he served. The spirit of exclusiveness, here condemned in the Apostles, has never ceased to trouble the Church of Christ, and still it incurs the same censure. Systems of church government and ministry have their use and their apostolic authority. It is right to respect them. But they do not exclude more unattached service. He who, with little idea of church order, is enabled to do good in his Master's name, has thus received an acknowledgment of the Holy Ghost that only blind prejudice will deny (cf. Numb. xi. 26-29).

The broad statement "He that is not against us is on our part" (*v.* 40), may be compared with Matth. xii. 30, "He that is not with me is against me." These sayings do not contradict one another. They apply to different conditions. The one last quoted treats of personal devotion to Jesus Christ and teaches that indifference amounts to rebellion, because the Master requires zeal in His cause. The other, now before us, regulates our judgments on our fellow-men and enjoins breadth of spirit. It assumes a state of active labour, and it declares that where such labour does not oppose the Christian cause it is to be regarded as helping it, even though it may differ from our ideas in points of detail.

In the verses that follow we see—

3. *AN ENCOURAGING ASSURANCE AND A SOLEMN WARNING*, *vv.* 41, 42.—The smallest service done to a disciple for Christ's sake shall be rewarded, not only in the next world, but by the enlargement of heart it will bring now. But he who, instead of ministering to the inexperienced disciples of Jesus, takes advantage of their simplicity to cause them to stumble, is doing the devil's own work. Better for such a betrayer of innocence to have had a great millstone—lit. "an ass millstone," too heavy for a man to move—hanged about his neck and to have been cast into the sea. Better be drowned like a dog than live to ensnare the simple and incur the most weighty of all condemnations.

4. *THE LAW OF SPIRITUAL PRUDENCE*, *vv.* 43-48.—Dealing with the subject of "offences" or stumbling-blocks, our Lord next teaches how the most valuable of earthly possessions is worth sacrificing for the sake of the soul. Such is the deceitfulness of sin that any gift, taste, or capacity, in itself useful as the hand or foot or eye, may become an occasion of stumbling and must be set aside if the spiritual life would prosper. In such a case the sacrifice will be a genuine one. It will make life poorer for the time, just as the loss of a limb would impair the bodily powers, but better than ruin.

We note the dread alternative "to be cast into hell,

into the fire that never shall be quenched." The Revised Version omits *vv.* 44 and 46. But in *v.* 48 the same words—"where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"—occur without question.

What do they signify? They are figurative; but what do they represent? "Hell," or Gehenna, *i.e.* "the valley of Hinnom," was the ravine outside Jerusalem where offal was thrown to be destroyed. Fires were always burning there for the purpose. That foul place came to represent the Jewish idea of the place of torment. The worm is also a consumer of refuse. In *v.* 48 we have therefore a figure of two great consuming forces, the worm and the fire, continually employed on souls in torment. There is a dark mystery of judgment here. We dare not indulge in presumptuous speculation. But we cannot overlook the fact that the worm and the fire are cleansing powers of nature. Their work is beneficent. If the fact of the need for them is grievous, the lack of them would be still more grievous. As long as there is moral foulness to remove, so long shall the spiritual worm and fire find work and their presence be a cause of thanksgiving.

5. *THE SALT OF LIFE*, *vv.* 49, 50.—The first of these verses is difficult. The best interpretation seems to be that our Lord sets forth the fire of trial and self-sacrifice that all His faithful servants must in some form undergo, as "salt," in that it preserves from corruption. Every Christian is "salted." Every act of sacrifice has preserving power. Only see that the salt is real.

To make an outward profession of discipleship without the inward reality is to lose savour and become absolutely worthless. We have here in other words the doctrine of the cross (*viii.* 34). A true disciple has been well described as holding "towards himself a heart of iron, towards his brother a heart of flesh, towards his God a heart of fire."

LESSON XX

JESUS IN PERÆA—THE LAW OF MARRIAGE—THE
BLESSING OF LITTLE CHILDREN—THE RICH
YOUNG MAN TRIED AND FOUND WANTING

Chap. x. 1-31

BETWEEN the close of last chapter and the beginning of this one there is an interval of at least three months. For records of that period we must go to John vii. 2-x. 21 and Luke ix. 51-x. 24.

Our gospel resumes the narrative at a point about six months previous to the crucifixion. The phrase "from thence" (*v.* 1) refers to some village in Galilee where our Lord sojourned awhile after His repulse by certain Samaritans (Luke ix. 56). Setting forth from thence, Jesus now entered the region of Peræa, on the east side of Jordan. It is to be noted that, although within the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, He no longer shunned observation; but, as in former years, He kept teaching the crowds that thronged to hear Him (*v.* 1). The Scribes and Pharisees were also in attendance, bent on mischief. Of this visit to Peræa three notable incidents are recorded by St. Mark.

I. The Pronouncement on Marriage and Divorce, *vv.* 2-12. — Probably the recent fate of the Baptist and the hope of getting Jesus into similar trouble with Herod and Herodias suggested to the Pharisees the question, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" (*v.* 2). The words added by St. Matthew (xix. 3), "for any cause," are here implied. The question was of the highest importance. Of late years the marriage tie among the Jews had become shamefully relaxed under surrounding heathen influences. Two schools of opinion prevailed among the Rabbis: that of Hillel, who held that a man might divorce his wife for almost any whim

or prejudice against her, and that of Shammai, who maintained the sanctity of the marriage bond and would allow divorce only for unfaithfulness. The latter party might expect to have the support of Jesus, but more probably both alike hoped to elicit something that they might turn to his hurt.

OUR LORD'S ANSWER, vv. 3-9.

1. He shows that the law of Moses was a concession to the Israelites' "hardness of heart." The great law-giver, guided by Divine wisdom, saw that it was impossible among so degraded a people as the Hebrews then were, to introduce the highest rules of living all at once. Therefore he suffered men to put away their wives even without the plea of unfaithfulness; but he regulated the practice so as to obviate, as far as possible, the wrong done to the woman (Deut. xxi. 10-14; xxiv. 1, 2).

2. Jesus points to the original principle of marriage as the ideal to be kept in view by His disciples (*vv.* 6-9). God has ordained the marriage tie as a life bond between one man and one woman. Separations and divorces, even when rendered necessary, are the fruits of sin, and always to be viewed as such.

The repeated enquiry of the disciples (*v.* 10) shows how low the prevailing sentiment must have fallen under the influence of the Scribes. Jesus lays down with final emphasis the rule of divorce. Its lawfulness in cases where the marriage vow has been broken is implied (Matt. v. 32), but otherwise divorce is a breach of the law of God. The equality assigned by Jesus to man and woman (*vv.* 11, 12) renders His saying specially remarkable. It is for Christians in considering this subject to bear in mind the parallel which Paul has drawn between the relation of husband and wife and that of Jesus Christ with the church of believers (Eph. v. 22-33). In presence of that mystery none dare regard lightly the holy bond of marriage.

II. The Blessing for Little Children, *vv.* 13-16.

—The subject of marriage just treated seems to have led

St. Mark to record next this beautiful and instructive incident. We note—

I. *THE PARENTS' APPROACH*, v. 13.—It was a comely habit for devout Jewish mothers to bring their little ones to receive a blessing, given with laying on of hands, from religious teachers whom they revered.

But the wholesome state of parental feeling that those mothers showed was lost upon the apostles, who had evidently forgotten the honour lately paid by the Lord to children (ix. 36, 37). The apostles only thought of the present inconvenience, and with ill-judged zeal for the Master's comfort they bade the women begone. Of a like spirit are all who slight early piety or who grudge time and trouble in teaching children gospel truth.

2. *THE LORD'S REPROOF*, vv. 14-16.—He was "much displeased," lit. "moved with indignation." He saw in the conduct of those mothers a beauty and a virtue to which the apostles were blind: and He knew that to repel such an appeal could not but prove hurtful. Doubtless some of those children were old enough to retain an impression on their memory. Who could say what good results the future might unfold from that day when they saw Jesus of Nazareth and received His blessing? So the disciples were reproved and the blessing given with abounding tenderness (v. 16). Moreover in blessing the little ones the Lord declared, "of such is the kingdom of God." That spiritual kingdom which enters into men as a quickening power and into which men enter as living members, belongs only to the childlike of heart as distinguished from the childish; the simple and teachable, not the trifling and wilful.

We may infer that He who received little children thus graciously will approve of their early dedication to Him in the recognised sacrament of Baptism.

III. *The Rich Young Ruler*, vv. 17-31.—St. Matthew (xix. 22) tells us that this man was young. St. Luke (xviii. 18) that he was a ruler or elder of some local synagogue.

1. *THE APPROACH TO JESUS, v. 17.*—He came eagerly and with reverence. His question showed worthy aspirations. It also showed great ignorance. It was not the question of the jailer at Philippi, uttered in acute distress (Acts xvi. 30); but the inquiry of a self-satisfied though warm-hearted young Pharisee who believed that this eternal life of which he had heard might be won by pious deeds, perhaps by some distinguished act of zeal, and who felt himself quite equal to the enterprise.

2. *THE TEST, vv. 18-21.*—*a.* In the question “Why callest thou me good?” (v. 18), or, as St. Matthew puts it “Why askest thou me concerning that which is good?” (Matt. xix. 17 R.V.), Jesus shows how inadequate an idea of goodness the young man possessed. “Good” was not a fitting term to be applied in compliment to a Rabbi, as the ruler had used it. It is an attribute of God alone. Jesus does not here disclaim it. But He could only accept it when offered on sufficient grounds.

b. By citing certain commandments from the second table of the law (v. 19), Jesus further exposed the ruler’s shallow view of truth. The reply “all these have I observed from my youth” shows that to him the commandments meant simply verbal enactments to be kept in a literal and mechanical way. To observe them thus, was no harder for a young man of his habits and training than to keep out of the criminal court. Their deep spiritual significance and the principles of conduct involved he had never yet realised.

In the summary of laws here given we note “Defraud not,” which has been styled St. Mark’s rendering of the tenth commandment (Lev. xix. 13).

c. Jesus was pleased with the young man’s candour and simplicity (v. 21), but it was necessary to humble him. The call “sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor” was no doubt a severe test, but the ruler had challenged it. He had to learn the true state of his heart and to realise the difference between obedience in the letter, which may be practised with a little care and self-control, and obedience in the spirit, which involves

surrender of heart and life to God, at the sacrifice, if need be, of something prized.

We must not imagine this command to be of universal application to all rich men. It was a test in a specific case. Neither the advocates of voluntary poverty nor those of socialism can justly claim it in support of their views. The Revised Version omits the words "take up the cross," but they are manifestly implied.

3. *THE RICH MAN'S FAILURE AND ITS LESSONS*, vv. 22-27.—The wealthy young ruler was called to become a poor man and join the band of Christian disciples. He failed to respond. "He was sad," lit. "overcast," "at that saying, and went away grieved," perhaps angry, at what seemed an unreasonable demand. We must not conclude that this was a final question of Eternal life or death, and that this ruler by holding to his wealth lost his soul. All we see here is a worthy but ignorant young man miss a great opportunity, and receive a needful lesson in what holy living really means. Whether he profited by it and humbled himself in repentance we do not know. From this incident our Lord drew impressive lessons. He pointed out the testing effect of riches on the spiritual life, the weakness of human nature and the sufficiency of divine grace (vv. 23-27). In the saying regarding a camel and the eye of a needle He quoted an oriental proverb of a bold and fanciful kind (v. 25). And to the disciples in their hopeless bewilderment (v. 26) He explained that while to poor human nature the temptations of wealth are as irresistible as the proverb implies, by the grace of God the richest man is enabled to withstand them.

4. *THE REWARD OF CHRISTIAN SELF-SACRIFICE*, vv. 28-31.—In St. Matthew's gospel (xix. 27) the question is added, "What shall we have therefore?" Peter's words were evidently spoken in a self-satisfied spirit, contrasting himself and his brethren with the young man who had just left them.

In our Lord's answer, uttered with solemn emphasis, we mark—(a) The transcendent character of the rewards,

“an hundred-fold.” Not in a niggardly and bargaining spirit shall the Master cause His servants to reap what they have sown for His sake and the gospel’s. (*b*) The reward begins here. In *v.* 30 we cannot suppose a recompense in kind; but the heart satisfaction of the gospel faith, even “with persecutions” to give zest to it, shall make amends for all material loss, and Christian fellowship shall compensate for broken family ties. (*c*) The reward is eternal. The phrase “in the world to come,” lit. “the age to come,” points to the infinite blessedness of the Lord’s triumphant reign when “our light affliction shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. iv. 17). (*d*) “But many that are first shall be last; and the last first,” *v.* 31. This saying has been well named “one of our Saviour’s seed thoughts.”

It has countless applications. Not every one who is now prominent and leading shall in the end be held of most account. The day of Christ will be a day of surprises. Let us meanwhile cultivate humility, and whether our Christian attainments be great or small, let them at least be genuine, for we have yet to face an ordeal where nothing but reality can stand (1 Cor. iii. 12-15).

LESSON XXI

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM—THE AMBITIOUS
APOSTLES—THE TRUE PATH OF HONOUR—
THE BLIND MAN OF JERICO

Chap. x. 32-52

BETWEEN verses 31 and 32 of this chapter St. Mark omits another interval of at least three months. For the record of that time we must go to Luke x. 38-xvii. 10, and John x. 22-xi. 55. We learn there that our Lord left the Peræa and went to Jerusalem for the

feast of Dedication about the beginning of December, retired to the Peræa again, and spake some of his most notable parables, *e.g.* the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, the Prodigal Son, and the Rich Man and the Beggar; came back to Bethany of Judæa and raised Lazarus from the grave, thereby exciting great interest and expectation among the common people, and so exasperating the chief priests and Pharisees that at a meeting of the Jewish Sanhedrin or Council at Jerusalem they resolved to bring about His death. Again He withdrew for safety, this time to Ephraim, an upland town 16 miles to the north-east of Jerusalem, and tarried there for a month with His disciples. Here our Gospel resumes its narrative.

I. The Last Journey to Jerusalem, *vii.* 32-34.—The Passover was now at hand, and Jesus with a band of followers descended eastwards from Ephraim to the Jordan valley, where they joined the stream of travellers from the north bound for Jerusalem to keep the feast.

Recent events, most of all the great miracle at Bethany, had aroused a new enthusiasm and hope that after all Jesus was about to assert Himself as the nation's Messiah and begin His reign of triumph over foreign oppressors. We can imagine the excitement with which in ever growing numbers the company of pilgrims swelled His train.

Yet the bearing of the Master Himself filled them with wonder and awe. In St. Mark's terse description we see Him striding onwards in front of all, as one intent on a fixed purpose, absorbed in thought, burdened with the future. Presently He called the twelve apostles to His side and attempted once more to make them understand the true situation. For the third time we observe Him unfold His coming fate in explicit terms. At Cæsarea Philippi He had spoken of rejection, sufferings, death, and resurrection (*viii.* 31). In Galilee he had repeated the announcement, and added to it that He would be betrayed (*ix.* 31). Now on the eve of the event He speaks with a detail that seems to

omit nothing, (*vv.* 33, 34). We note how every incident of those awful hours of the Passion was foreseen, weighed and pondered in the mind of Jesus. He had spent his ministry under the shadow of the Cross, although with the joy of the Resurrection set before Him. Yet even now His words, clear and momentous as they were, fall on dull ears and unsympathetic hearts. They would bear fruit one day, but not yet.

II. The Ambition of James and John, *vv.* 35-40.—Nothing shows more clearly the lack of understanding among the disciples than this request of the sons of Zebedee. From St. Matthew (*xx.* 20) we learn that Salome their mother came with them, and bowing reverently before Jesus sought on their behalf the places of honour on His right hand and on His left in His kingdom.

In this request we note—

1. *A LOYAL AND DEVOTED SPIRIT.*—Those apostles believed in their Master and sought to be with Him.

2. *A MISTAKEN AMBITION.*—With all their attachment to Jesus they only thought of the national triumph that they imagined to be at hand. To take part in it they were ready to encounter danger, but they had no conception of the Cross.

3. In the question of *v.* 38 and again in the promise of *v.* 39, Jesus used a figure readily understood by the disciples. They erred as to its application, but its terms were evident enough. To drink of His cup signified to partake of the lot that awaited Him (*cf.* Ps. *xvi.* 5, *xxiii.* 5, also *ch.* *xiv.* 36). To be baptised with His baptism meant to pass through an ordeal such as that into which He would soon be plunged (*cf.* 1 Cor. *x.* 2). Both metaphors here describe suffering, the one as inward and voluntary, the other as outward and enforced.

Faithful and loyal as those Apostles were, notwithstanding their present delusions, Jesus could assure them of a share in His *sufferings* (*cf.* *viii.* 34, 35, also Col. *i.* 24). We know how the promise was fulfilled. James was the first of the Apostles to undergo martyrdom (Acts

xii. 2). John had the longest experience of trial. But the *honours* of Christ's kingdom are not bestowed by favour and personal preference. They are conferred according to service rendered and fitness to receive them. "It is for them for whom it hath been prepared" (v. 40, R.V.)

III. **The True Path of Honour**, vv. 41-45.—The petition of the sons of Zebedee moved their brethren to indignation (v. 41). In the present ambitious temper of the twelve, personal jealousy was inevitable. We see Jesus therefore repeat with emphasis the instruction already given by Him at Capernaum (ix. 35).

1. *THE RULE OF THE WORLD CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF HIS KINGDOM*, v. 42.—Among the Gentiles or heathen rulers of whom the disciples had experience, energy and grasping self-assertion were the forces that prevailed. But in Christ's kingdom the opposite order would obtain. He was to be accounted foremost who could do and impart the greatest good. The way to reach distinction is to serve, to be the "minister" or servant of others; and that not by compulsion but by goodwill (vv. 43, 44).

2. *HE BRINGS FORWARD THE EXAMPLE OF HIS OWN SACRIFICE*, v. 45.—In the life and death of Jesus mankind have received their crowning lesson in true service. It is well to remember that the Greek words (*lutrou anti*) here rendered "ransom" signify in a distinct and unmistakable way a gift *instead of* or in *substitution for*, and thus stamps the true character of the Lord's atoning death (cf. 1 Tim. ii. 6; Rom. v. 10, 11; Ephes. i. 7). The servants of Christ cannot add to the sin offering, cannot augment the ransom paid, but they can live in its spirit, and, according to their measure and opportunity, serve mankind.

IV. **The Blind Man at Jericho**, vv. 46-52.—The city of Jericho lay in the route Jesus now travelled towards Jerusalem. Ever since the entrance of Israel into Canaan, some fourteen hundred and fifty years before, Jericho had been a place of interesting associa-

tions (Joshua ii.—vi. ; 2 Samuel x. 5 ; 1 Kings xvi. 34). It was now a stronghold and a prosperous centre of commerce, standing among groves of palm trees on a well watered plain, and was the meeting place of several caravan roads.

In his narrative St. Mark mentions only one blind man, healed as Jesus "went out from Jericho" (v. 46) ; St. Luke records the cure of one as He entered (Luke xviii. 35) ; and St. Matthew says that two were healed "as they departed from Jericho" (Matth. xx. 29). No doubt, as in the case of the demoniacs (v. 2), there were really two, one more conspicuous than the other.

1. *THE BLIND MAN'S FAITH*, vv. 46, 47.—Blind Bartimæus is described as "the son of Timæus" by way of explanation to Gentile readers unaware of the meaning of the word. He seems to have been well known in Jericho as a wayside beggar. On this occasion he was greatly excited. The fame of Jesus of Nazareth had reached him and stirred within him a new hope. Where others had been blessed with restored vision surely there would be a blessing for him too. At any rate he would try. So, as soon as the word reached him that Jesus was at hand, the beggar lifted up his voice in the loud wailing entreaty, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (v. 47). That cry, uttered in those circumstances, showed both a belief in Jesus as Messiah and personal trust in His power and will to help. An attempt on the part of bystanders to silence him had only the result of his redoubling his clamour (v. 48).

Bartimæus presents a striking picture of a soul in earnest about salvation ; aware of his need ; in darkness, but seeking light ; convinced that Jesus is able to deliver him, and full of entreaty. Such an earnest soul will not be put down by bystanders, even though some who ought to help him only try to hinder.

2. *THE BLIND MAN'S REWARD*, vv. 49-52.—The cry of faith and distress fell on the ear of the Saviour.

In St. Mark's graphic narrative we see the Master halt

in His march with the command "Call ye him" (*v.* 49, R.V.). The message is conveyed with sympathy, "Take courage, arise, He calleth thee." We see the blind man spring up, throw aside his *abba* or heavy blanket-covering, and hasten to cast himself at the feet of Jesus.

Then came the kindly question (*v.* 51); and the prompt reply, "Rabboni, that I might receive my sight." The case was now ripe for divine healing. Faith had been aroused. No person could mistake the man's position. And, accordingly, by one gracious utterance Jesus healed and commended him (*v.* 52). Instead of a blind mendicant sitting by the wayside to excite pity, we see now a grateful disciple attach himself to the band of followers going up to Jerusalem.

This story is full of good cheer. It reminds us that no soul is unheeded of Christ. However long a man may have lain in darkness, once convinced of his need, let him call upon the Lord, for He is waiting to be gracious. And once enlightened with the Gospel's saving power, let him set his face Zionward, attach himself to the band of pilgrims, and daily follow Jesus in the way.

LESSON XXII

PALM SUNDAY—THE TRIUMPHAL RIDE TO JERUSALEM
—MONDAY IN PASSION WEEK—THE BARREN
FIG-TREE—THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE—
THE DISCOURSE ON FAITH

Chap. xi. 1-26

I. The Triumphal Ride to Jerusalem, *vv.* 1-11.—To understand this striking occurrence we must recollect that it was the climax of a popular excitement that had been growing for weeks. Every springtime the celebration of the Passover, Israel's greatest festival and re-union, caused no small stir in Jerusalem. But

this year the fame of Jesus and the expectation of a great national deliverance had wrought popular feeling up to a remarkable pitch. Jesus had reached Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, on Friday evening. The Sabbath—Friday to Saturday at sunset—He had spent in retirement, and in the evening He had supped at the house of Simon the leper, where Mary had anointed Him with spikenard,—an incident St. Mark relates out of its order of time (xiv. 3-9). Now, on the first day of the week (Palm Sunday), one band of enthusiastic pilgrims, who had lodged outside the city, set forth to escort Him thither, while another came from Jerusalem to meet Him. The route chosen was round the southern shoulder of the Mount of Olives.

A little way from Bethany (*house of dates*) the village of Bethphage (*house of figs*) came in view, and thither Jesus sent two of the disciples to borrow an ass's colt "whereon never man sat" (vv. 2, 3). It is unnecessary to suppose supernatural knowledge in the terms of this message. No doubt the colt belonged to a friend who Jesus knew would be willing to lend it. In the R.V., verse 3 is rendered, "and straightway He will send him back hither," forming part of the Lord's message to the owner of the ass, undertaking to return it as soon as it had served His purpose. In v. 4 "a place where two ways met" is more correctly "in the open street."

In the record of this scene we are struck with the combined lowliness and majesty, vv. 7-10.

1. *THERE WAS LOWLY SIMPLICITY.*—We see no costly display or gorgeous military escort. Even the ass was borrowed. Its trappings were the *abbas* (plaids) of humble men.

2. *YET IT WAS A ROYAL PROGRESS.*—It fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah (ix. 9), about the coming of Zion's King. The general belief among thoughtful Jews was that He should come riding upon an ass. In Judæa the ass was a creature vastly superior to our western variety. In Israel's history it had been esteemed no

unworthy steed for the noblest and the best. In contrast with the horse, which was associated with war, the ass was the symbol of peace, and it now fitly bore the Prince of Peace.

The rapture of the multitude, the palm-leaves and garments strewed in the way, the shouts of welcome that hailed the Kingdom and the King; especially the oft-repeated "Hosanna" lit. "Save now, I beseech Thee"—and the accompanying words of praise (Ps. cxviii. 25-26),—all were marks of royal state as Jesus presented Himself before the nation, their avowed Messiah. Most kingly of all was the bearing of the Lord Himself. He knew as none around Him the import of that visit to Jerusalem. Before many days were past the voices now loudly calling "Hosanna" would as loudly cry "Crucify him."

Yet He bated no jot of His resolution. He realised the infinite issues at stake and accepted His destiny. As He rode on to rejection, to suffering, and to death, the sacrifice to be bound to the horns of the altar (Ps. cxviii. 27), He put from Him the thought of His own trials, and wept over the doomed city, and the awful fate He knew awaited her children within her.

Such steadfastness and unselfish sorrow proclaimed a king indeed.

And now we see Jesus on reaching Jerusalem disengage Himself from the crowd, pay a brief visit to the temple, and, after surveying the proceedings there, return to Bethany for the night.

II. The Barren Fig-tree, *vv.* 12-14 (Monday in Passion Week).—This miracle was symbolical. Probably our Lord had spent the night in prayer and meditation, and left Bethany for Jerusalem without a morning meal. Beholding a fig-tree by the wayside covered with early leaves, He drew near in hope of obtaining a little fruit to stay His hunger. In His disappointment at finding none, the similarity of that tree to the Jewish nation struck the spiritual imagination of Jesus. They too had borne early leaves of godly profession. When the rest

of mankind were still in darkness they had possessed the laws, rites, and ceremonies of true religion. Only yesterday they had made a fair show of zeal. Yet He had sought in vain to satisfy His heart amongst them with the fruits of living faith and obedience. So now He improves the occasion for the benefit of the disciples. Doom was pronounced on the barren fig-tree, and it began to wither at His word. The parable they would understand in due time. It has a lesson for us to-day.

In churches and in individuals the fairest leaves of godly profession without the fruit of godly character are a delusion. They disappoint and displease our Master. They contain the elements of decay.

Some call this a miracle of judgment because a way-side fig-tree was withered up. It may more fitly be termed a deed of mercy and kindness for the enlightenment of mankind.

III. The Cleansing of the Temple, *vv.* 15-18.—St. John describes a scene at the commencement of our Lord's ministry that we see here repeated at its close (*cf.* John ii. 13-17).

1. THE HOUSE OF GOD PROFANED.—The crowds of Jews, estimated at 2,700,000 persons, who repaired to Jerusalem from all quarters of the world to keep the Passover, furnished a rich harvest for many in and around the city. Owners of flocks and herds brought them to sell for sacrifice. Some brought doves for the use of the poorer worshippers (*Lev.* xii. 8 ; *Luke* ii. 24).

Changers of money were there too, for the convenience of strangers, since no coin except the shekel of the sanctuary was accepted as temple tribute (*Ex.* xxx. 13).

All those arrangements were natural enough. But the greed of the Jews had overcome their reverence. A market had been opened within the temple precincts—probably in the court of the Gentiles—and there the noise, filth, and confusion of trade profaned the sanctuary from morning till night. The chief priests, knowing well its unlawfulness, connived at a business that no doubt brought them a share of profit.

2. *THE HONOUR OF GOD VINDICATED.*—Jesus was jealous with a godly jealousy for His Father's house (Ps. lxi. 9). We are struck with the promptitude and complete success of His action. The traders and their stock are expelled, the money changers' tables overturned, all business traffic stopped ; and those strenuous measures He justifies by quoting the prophecy "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. lvi. 7), adding, "but ye have made it a den of thieves" (cf. Jer. vii. 11). So manifest was the scandal that, once boldly attacked, neither traders nor temple authorities dared raise a hand in its defence. All that the chief priests could do was to renew their plots for the destruction of Jesus (v. 18).

From this incident we receive a new impression of our Lord's personal majesty and moral power. We are also taught to respect sacred associations. There is a reverence due to every place where God's people meet to worship Him and celebrate His ordinances. Above all let us see that we do not in our own hearts carry the market and the exchange with us into the house of God.

IV. *The Efficacy of Faith*, vv. 22-26 (Tuesday in Passion Week).—On their morning journey to Jerusalem, the apostles drew the Lord's attention to the withered fig-tree that He had yesterday condemned. But Jesus did not farther explain the miracle. He replied instead to the wonder of Peter and the apostles at the power He had shown in performing it.

In this striking discourse on "faith in God," we must mark these points:

1. *FAITH IS A REASONABLE THING*, vv. 23, 24.—Our Lord's assurance that by faith they could remove the mountain beside them is strictly true, but under needful conditions. For what is faith in God? It is not presumptuous fancy or selfwill, such as might lead a foolish person to address the mountain and think to see it obey him. Faith in God presupposes some knowledge of the ways and will of God. Only in the knowledge that God desired the mountain to be moved at His servant's

word would such a command to it be an act of faith. But the apostles had no such knowledge. Their faith in God had therefore to be shown by confronting in His name and strength the mountains of sin, temptation, hardship, and opposition, that stood in the way of the objects which they knew God desired them to attain.

In bidding those mountains depart they might look for His blessing on their prayers and endeavours.

2. *CHRISTIAN FAITH MUST WORK BY LOVE*, *vv.* 25, 26.—The “standing” in prayer here mentioned implies no divine preference for that posture over kneeling, prostration, or any other that God’s servants may adopt to express reverence. But a forgiving spirit is essential. Without it faith is vain because out of fellowship with Jesus Christ. We cannot look for forgiveness from God whilst we refuse to extend it to our brethren. The prominence given to that truth here, in the Lord’s Prayer (*Matt.* vi. 12, 14, 15), and again in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (*Matt.* xviii. 35), shows the great importance attached to it.

LESSON XXIII

THE DAY OF QUESTIONS (TUESDAY)—THE LORD’S
AUTHORITY CHALLENGED — THE PARABLE OF
THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Chap. xi. 27-xii. 12

TUESDAY in Passion week has been well named “the day of questions.” From morning till night we see our Lord in the temple courts beset by enemies, one and all striving to catch Him in His words, and either to discredit Him with the multitude, or bring Him under the displeasure of the Roman authorities. The tension and stress of conflict are more marked than ever. On that memorable Tuesday our Lord uttered many of His most solemn and momentous sayings. Here we can only consider those recorded by St. Mark.

I. The Question of Authority, *vv.* 27-33.

1. THE CHALLENGERS, *v.* 27.—As Jesus walked in the temple and taught there came to Him a deputation from the Sanhedrin or High Court of the Jews.

That great council was composed of seventy-one members, and comprised (*a*) the chief priests, including the High Priest, his predecessors in office, and the chiefs of courses in the temple (1 Chron. xxiv.); (*b*) the leading scribes or rabbis; (*c*) certain representative elders of the people, a class that existed in Israel since the time of Moses (Ex. xix. 7). This council met daily and judged all sorts of domestic and civil questions that involved points of law. It also decided matters connected with public worship and festivals, and gave an authoritative interpretation of difficult passages of Scripture. Once and again its members had resolved, formally and informally, that Jesus must die because His teaching interfered with their authority (*v.* 18, John vii. 19, 32; xi. 50-53). But as yet they had not dared to take open proceedings against Him.

2. THE CHALLENGE, *v.* 28.—The deputation approached Jesus with a twofold enquiry—(*a*) What kind of authority did He claim, to warrant His strong measures of yesterday? (*b*) Whence was that authority derived? The Sanhedrin had not conferred it. He was no certified scribe or anointed priest. What then was His commission?

3. THE LORD'S REPLY, *vv.* 29-33.—The question was answered by another. "The Baptism of John, was it from heaven or of men? answer me!" So saying, He placed His questioners in a dilemma. If they acknowledged John as a prophet of God, they stood self-condemned in opposing Jesus of whom John testified. If they denied John's prophetic mission, they ran counter to the general belief in him, a belief intensified since his martyrdom. Once, indeed, they had declared of John, "He hath a devil" (Matt. xi. 18). But in the present state of popular sentiment they feared to repeat the calumny. They took refuge in a pitiful

evasion, "We cannot tell," and Jesus rejoined "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Why did our Lord reply thus instead of at once declaring His authority to be divine? There is more here than an adroit parry and rejoinder. It was because He would not cast pearls before swine. To the humble and teachable mind Jesus willingly imparted knowledge. But to the demands of unbelief and malice He gave no satisfaction. They knew well that yesterday's deed was a righteous protest in God's name against an outrage of the sanctity of the house of God. He would not, therefore, reply to a question that ought not to have been put. So has it been always. So under different outward conditions is it to-day. Only to him who is willing to do His will is the promise made that he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God (John vii. 17).

II. The Wicked Husbandmen, xii. 1-11.—Immediately after the encounter with those Jewish leaders, Jesus, resuming His walk in the temple, began, in their hearing, to speak in parables. Of several, uttered with a direct bearing upon His hostile audience, St. Mark records but one. Here our Lord sets forth:—

I. THE CHOSEN PEOPLE'S PRIVILEGES, v. 1.—The figure of a vineyard is used in the Old Testament to describe the position of the Jewish nation (Ps. lxxx. 8-16, Isa. v. 1-7). Here the similitude is changed from the vineyard itself to the husbandmen in charge of it.

The vineyard is the visible kingdom of God on earth. God had chosen the Hebrew nation "to dress it and to keep it." He had set them to dwell in a goodly land fenced off from neighbours on every side by natural barriers, and still more completely separated by their divine laws, rites, and institutions. In verse 1 we note that the term "hedge" signifies, generally, a fence. In Judæa it would mean the dry stone wall commonly used to enclose a vineyard. "Winesat" or "wine vat" is the trough of the wine-press that received the juice. "A tower" is the watch tower—called by Isaiah "a cottage" (Isa. i. 8, xxiv. 20) where men sat to guard the crop.

All those arrangements illustrate the constant protecting care of God for His chosen people. They lacked nothing to secure them in freedom, peace, and prosperity. They were the husbandmen in charge of that fair vineyard. Their covenanted rent was to be paid in fruit. God required that as faithful custodiers of His truth they should bring forth righteousness, and enlighten the world in divine wisdom.

2. *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE'S SIN*, *vv.* 2-8. — God looked for fruits of righteousness and received none.

From time to time He raised up prophets, His own messengers, to call Israel to a higher measure of service. These were the servants of the lord of the vineyard, and and the fruit He desired was a ready response to their call. But how were they received? Elijah, one of the foremost, had to flee for his life (1 Kings xix. 3). Micaiah was thrown into a dungeon (1 Kings xxii. 24-27). So was Jeremiah (Jer. xxxvii. 15, 16). Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was stoned (2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21). Isaiah is said by tradition to have been sawn asunder. Many more suffered persecution even unto death (1 Kings xviii. 13, Heb. xi. 36, 37).

Notwithstanding all the exhortations and warnings and judgments God had administered, Israel remained obdurate and void of spiritual life. And now to the present generation the Lord of the vineyard had sent His Son charged with the call to penitence, faith, and obedience, and bearing stronger and more convincing credentials than any of the prophets.

And how was He received? Jesus standing there in the midst of those hostile Jews told them plainly how they were about to treat Him. As they listened to His parable they would remember the hatred they bore Him, the plots against His life they had contrived, their recent resolve in council, and the fell purpose they still cherished. Realising these things they felt the force of the words "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard" (*vv.* 7, 8).

3. *THE CHOSEN PEOPLE'S DOOM*, vv. 9-11.—
“What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do?”

In St. Mark's record Jesus Himself replies. St. Matthew puts the answer into the mouth of bystanders who were struck by His story. The difference is slight, for if Jesus did not with His own lips utter the words of verse 9, He certainly drew them forth from His audience.

In the calamitous dispersion of the Jewish nation and the transfer of their foremost place in God's kingdom to the Christian Church, we see those husbandmen destroyed and the vineyard given to others.

4. *A SUPPLEMENTARY PARABLE to complete the lesson*, vv. 10, 11.—In the Lord's quotation from Psalm cxviii. 22, 23, the heir cast out and slain appears as “the stone which the builders refused.” But under this new figure Jesus was able to show what would occur after His enemies had done their worst.

He “is become the head of the corner.” Not only an important stone in the building, but that which binds two adjacent walls together. Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone in Zion, elect, precious (1 Peter ii. 6), unites Jew and Gentile, bond and free, in the fellowship of His Church. All are joined together in Him, their living Head, their common Redeemer and King.

Truly “This was from the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes” (v. 11, R.V.).

The passage is full of practical reflections:—

1. We hold to-day, and in fuller measure, the place of privilege once enjoyed by the Jews. In point of light, liberty, and opportunity, no generation of the children of men has had so great a trust committed to them as our own. How are we responding? Where is our return of fruit? How far are we striving to enlighten mankind and reveal the spirit of the Master as He has commanded us to do?

2. As we read in verse 12 how, though conscience-stricken, those Jewish rulers refused to repent, we learn that conviction of sin and error is not enough. A soul

may carry such conviction about with him, and, though at times uneasy, still remain hardened and impenitent. Let us beware of such folly. Once a sin is revealed, let there be no rest till it is abandoned. Once the way of righteousness is made plain, let us never cease from prayer and effort until we can affirm that we are walking in it.

LESSON XXIV

THE DAY OF QUESTIONS (*continued*)—THE WIDOW'S MITES

Chap. xii. 13-44

NEVER has the contrast between low cunning and exalted wisdom been more marked than on that Tuesday in the temple at Jerusalem. The deputation of councillors retired baffled, but only to contrive a new device. Keeping out of sight personally, they now sent to Jesus certain of the younger Pharisees and along with them Herodians; those rival sects again, as in Galilee (iii. 6), uniting in unholy alliance against Jesus, if by any means they might "catch Him in talk" (v. 13, R.V.).

I. The Question of Tribute, vv. 14-17.

The lawfulness of paying taxes to Rome was a point of dispute among the Jews. The Pharisees and the multitude held that the heathen state could not justly tax the people of God and that the coins bearing the Emperor's image and title were idolatrous. When they paid taxes it was under protest.

The Herodians were less stringent in their views; and it was a dangerous matter to discuss.

Some years before, one Judas of Galilee had raised an insurrection against the Roman poll-tax, and had lost his life (Acts v. 37). Now the representatives of both sects approached Jesus with an air of deference and begged for

His judgment on the point. They knew, they said, that He regarded not the "person"—*i.e.* outward condition—of any man, but spake the truth to all. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?" (*vv.* 14, 15). It was a crafty trick. If Jesus answered "yes," the Pharisees would denounce Him to the people as unpatriotic. If He said "no," the Herodians would report Him to the Roman authorities as disaffected. But in a word our Lord swept aside the net of hypocrisy. "Why tempt ye me?" He exclaimed. Then calling for a "penny" or denarius, the most common coin in circulation, worth $8\frac{1}{2}$ d., He pointed to the image of Tiberius Cæsar, with the superscription running round, and asked whose these were? They answered "Cæsar's." "Render (*i.e.* give back)," He replied, "to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's" (*v.* 17). As long as they accepted the image of Cæsar in business payments they thereby acknowledged Cæsar's authority, and they could not justly refuse tribute. But on the same principle He bade them remember that the image of God was stamped on every one of themselves, and see that they also gave back to God the allegiance that was *His* rightful due (*Gen.* i. 27; *1 Cor.* xi. 7). In this saying our Lord laid down for all time the rule of righteous citizenship. The powers that be, apart from their religious beliefs, are ordained of God. Loyal obedience is therefore the duty of every man. Only when the civil authorities command men to break the law of God is it right to refuse submission. And let it be very clear that such refusal is really from religious principle, accompanied by regard for good order, and not from prejudice and selfwill (*Romans* xiii. 1-7).

II. The Sadducees' Question, *vv.* 18-27.—The Sadducees, possibly numbering amongst them the Herodians just repulsed, now put forward a question of their own. They looked with contempt on the popular belief in a hereafter (*Acts* xxiii. 8). They professed to respect the law of Moses and the prophets, but they rejected the tradition of the elders. No doubt the law

enjoined that a man should, in certain circumstances, wed his deceased brother's wife for the preservation of his brother's name. It was a rule in keeping with an unrefined and primitive age (Deut. xxv. 5-10; Ruth iii. 13).

But the case stated here by the Sadducees, besides being in the last degree improbable, was evidently intended as a coarse and scornful jibe at the doctrine of a resurrection. In reply Jesus plainly told them that their question only exposed their ignorance of those Scriptures whose authority they acknowledged, as well as their blindness to the power of God. Their unspiritual and shallow minds made light of what they did not comprehend.

He then laid down two weighty truths.

1. The resurrection life will differ from the present life in its conditions. By the power of God the spiritual body shall take the place of the natural. Corporeal relationships shall be exchanged for a fellowship like that of the angels in heaven (*v.* 25; cf. 1 Cor. xv. 35-54).

2. The revelation of God in the Books of Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob does not refer merely to those patriarchs' worship of God whilst they dwelt on earth. It proves that they are now alive. "He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living" (*v.* 27). Hence the truth of a future life may be learned even from the law. The importance of these authoritative statements given by our Lord Himself cannot be over-estimated.

III. **The Scribe's Question, *vv.* 28-34.**—We are not obliged to assume a treacherous intention here. Impressed by the wisdom of our Lord's answers, this man, a Pharisee and a teacher of the law, ventured a question upon a point much discussed by the Rabbis, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (*v.* 28). The scribes divided the law into 613 precepts, including 248 positive enactments and 365 prohibitions; and they counted Sabbath observance, circumcision, sacrifices, and the fashion of religious robes, as of the greatest importance.

But Jesus passed those external things by, and proclaimed the spiritual principles at the foundation of the divine government:—(1) “The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (cf. Deut. vi. 4). (2) “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (cf. Lev. xix. 18). These, He said, are the great commandments. In thus placing love to God and man above all statutes, rites, and ceremonies, Jesus was only endorsing what psalmists and prophets had striven for centuries to instil into the stubborn hearts of the Jews (Ps. xl. 6-8, Hosea vi. 6, Micah vi. 6-8). And this scribe had the candour to acknowledge it. The Lord’s sublime words struck him with conviction. His answer was thoughtful and reverent (*vv.* 32, 33). And for reward Jesus assured him “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” He was touched, convinced, but not yet converted. Appreciation and sympathy had still to be followed by repentance and faith. He viewed and admired the kingdom, but he was not fit to enter it. Meanwhile the other questioners perceived that their cunning was in vain, and ceased from their wicked efforts.

IV. The Lord’s Counter-question, *vv.* 35-37.—In St. Matthew’s gospel we learn that this question was preceded by another, “What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?” (Matt. xxii. 42), and upon the Pharisees replying, “the son of David,” our Lord’s rejoinder was the question here recorded. He quotes Psalm cx., wherein David was believed to behold in prophetic vision one of his posterity who was also his Lord. The importance attached to the psalm is proved by the fact that no words of the Old Testament are so often quoted in the New (Acts ii. 34, 35; 1 Cor. xv. 25; Heb. i. 13; v. 6; vii. 17, 21). But on this occasion the audience were dumb. To reply that the son of David after the flesh was David’s Lord by divine nature would not have been beyond the knowledge of the scribes. But it came too near an admission of the

claims of Jesus. Therefore they stood in wilful and gloomy silence, while the common people, with the triumphal march from Bethany still fresh in mind, listened with glad anticipation to His words.

V. The Scribes denounced, *vv.* 38-40.—This passage is St. Mark's summary of a long and terrible address more fully recorded by St. Matthew (xxiii. 1-39). It was uttered in sorrow and indignation at the obstinate perverseness with which those leaders of the nation refused the light and betrayed their solemn trust. Their sanctimonious pride, their love of dignified robes and ceremonies, their avarice, their hypocrisy, and the awful fate that awaited them, were now proclaimed in powerful and scathing language. It was His last recorded protest against the evils with which throughout His ministry Jesus had never ceased to contend. Nothing to-day is more opposed to the spirit of the gospel than pretentiousness and cant in every form.

VI. The Widow's Offering, *vv.* 41-44.—As the Lord sat resting after the exertion of earnest speech, His eye fell upon an object that gladdened for a moment His sad spirit. He chanced to be in that part of the temple precincts termed "The Court of the Women," where stood thirteen brazen chests for receiving the tribute of worshippers for the maintenance of the services. Many rich persons gave liberally; but among the offerers came a poor widow, and dropped in "two mites, which make a farthing." It was the smallest offering permitted, a mite being the smallest copper coin in use among the Jews; yet Jesus at once exalted that modest gift above the rest. Wherefore? Because of the goodwill and self-denial that prompted it. He taught mankind to measure all actions by a spiritual standard. The devotion of the giver determines the place of his gift in the estimation of Christ. Jesus still sits over against every treasury and weighs His people's offerings in the same scales. Do those who glibly talk of giving "their mite" remember that the widow's mite meant "all that she had, even all her living"?

LESSON XXV

PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE DESTRUCTION OF
JERUSALEM AND THE SECOND COMING OF
CHRIST

Chap. xiii.

JESUS had left the temple never to return. That Tuesday saw the close of His public ministry. The precious truths He had still to deliver on earth would be spoken in private to the apostles. The common people had that day "heard Him gladly" (xii. 37). But He knew how unstable was their favour, resting as it did on expectations that must prove vain. Already some of them had been shaken in their allegiance (John xii. 34, 42). The apostles, for all that they had heard and seen, still failed to comprehend Him. As they passed out of the temple courts, glad no doubt to be relieved from the strain of controversy, one of them called the Master's attention to the marvels of the building. The massive foundation stones, $37\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length, 12 in height, and 18 in breadth; the noble proportions of the whole structure, measuring as it did 600 feet square, the gorgeous central fabric of white marble, with its richly-gilded roof glittering in the sun,—all served to divert the thoughts of the disciples. But Jesus was in no mood for distraction. His heart was full of the impending ruin He had sought in vain to avert. To the speaker's remark He replied, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (v. 2). That prediction was fulfilled, partly through fire, partly by decay and neglect. In course of little more than a century the site of that great temple was ploughed up.

And now, crossing the valley of the Kedron, the little company began the ascent of the Mount of Olives. Presently they sat down to rest; and as they gazed at

the temple now in full view over against them, James, John, Peter, and Andrew, disturbed by the Master's last words, came privately and addressed to Him the question "Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled (v. 4)? For answer the Lord gave utterance to the discourse here recorded in part by St. Mark. A full exposition of it is impossible. Many of those sayings, like the Old Testament prophecies, contain various references, some of which we can see but dimly. Two leading events stand conspicuous among them, viz., the coming judgment upon Jerusalem and the Lord's second and glorious advent. We can but note the following points:—

I. The Beginning of Sorrows, lit. of Travail, vv. 6-8, R.V.—False messiahs, wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines—such would be the birth-pangs of the Church of Christ, declared by the Master to be the death-throes of the Jewish state. The fulfilment of this prophecy is a matter of history in the period between the Crucifixion and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. We learn that similar convulsions on a wider scale are to herald the Lord's second appearing (1 Thess. v. 1-3; 2 Thess. ii. 3).

II. The Trials and Triumphs of the Saints, vv. 9-13.—In those disturbed times the disciples of Jesus underwent continual hardship, *e.g.*, Peter and John were dragged before the Sanhedrin (Acts iv. 3-21; v. 17, 18, 27-41); James was slain (Acts xii. 2); Paul was beaten with rods (2 Cor. xi. 24), and brought before Felix and Festus and King Agrippa and the Emperor Nero (Acts xxiv.-xxvi.; 2 Timothy, iv. 16). There is also allusion here to later martyrdoms and the persecutions from which the Church militant, in one place or another, has never been exempt, and which shall try her until the Lord returns.

But, in spite of all opposition, the gospel made its way, until before 70 A.D. it had penetrated throughout the empire, from Judæa to Spain and Babylon. And we

believe that it shall be preached for a testimony in every nation on earth before the end of this dispensation comes.

The "take no thought" of *v.* 11 means, "Be not anxious" (comp. Matt. vi. 25), and enjoins, not heedlessness, but calm confidence, such as the apostles displayed, under the assurance of God's sustaining presence. The endurance to the end (*v.* 13) is not merely patient suffering, but loyal perseverance in the faith notwithstanding temptations and persecutions. Such steadfastness was the means of saving the Christians at Jerusalem, who escaped on the eve of its destruction. In a wider and a deeper sense it is the condition of spiritual safety whether for a church or in an individual.

III. The Abomination of Desolation, *vv.* 14-18; cf. Daniel ix. 27, xi. 31, and xii. 11. This passage sets forth the near tokens of the fall of Jerusalem. A succession of tyrannical governors, Felix, Albinus, and Gessius Florus, so exasperated the Jews, never easily held in subjection, that in 66 A.D. a revolt broke out in Judæa and raged for four years. The city was invested; but the Jews, instead of uniting against the common foe, waged war upon one another until the Zealots, an extreme sect of fanatics, succeeded in seizing the temple, and turned the holy place into a scene of riot and outrage. The Christians at Jerusalem, shocked by this desecration, called to mind the Master's injunction here recorded, and upon the Roman general Cestius Gallus raising the siege for a time, they fled to Pella, one of the cities of Decapolis, about a hundred miles off. This account of the "abomination of desolation" is more probable than that which refers it to the Roman eagle standards rising above the temple from the garrison tower of Antonia. These were no doubt an "abomination" to the Jews, but they were nothing new that could be noted in the future as a warning to flee. Even while Jesus spake that evening on Olivet He was probably gazing at them in the distance. The brief opportunity to be afforded for flight, and the urgent need that it be taken advantage of, are here set forth with graphic power (*vv.* 15-18).

IV. The Days of Tribulation and Horror,

vv. 19-23.—From the flight of the Christians in 68 A.D. until the final fall of Jerusalem in September 70 A.D. the horrors of the siege continued to increase. In spring of the latter year Titus, the son of the Emperor Vespasian, had completed the close investment of the city. The crowd of strangers assembled for the Passover were unable to leave, and added to the general misery. Civil strife, famine, and pestilence ran riot. In their madness the contending sects destroyed the stores of food. In straits of hunger the claims of humanity were set aside. Strong men robbed the weak of their last morsel. Parents and children fought for scraps of offal in the streets, and every kind of atrocity was practised. Those who sought refuge with the enemy were crucified, hundreds at a time. When the last defences gave way and the Roman legions stormed the ramparts of Zion, it was said that eleven hundred thousand Jews had perished during those four years. A wretched multitude of ninety-seven thousand survivors were led away captive.

To the prediction of such horrors our Lord adds the assurance that “for the elect’s sake, whom He hath chosen, He hath shortened the days” (*v.* 20). Titus declared that God must be on his side when he was able to capture those impregnable towers in less than five months. The shortening of the days was a dispensation of mercy, though brought about by the vigour of the assault and the folly and wickedness of the defenders. And this was “for the elect’s sake.” Even in the worst days of Jerusalem, after the Christians had fled, God had a remnant of His own whom He remembered. The preserving influence of good men among the wicked is a well attested truth, declared plainly by Jesus in the saying “Ye are the salt of the earth” (*Matt.* v. 13). Ten good men would have saved Sodom (*Gen.* xviii. 32).

V. The Coming of the Son of Man, *vv.* 24-31.—

This passage the destruction of Jerusalem fails to explain. He to whom a thousand years are as one day passes from the near to the far future. It is manifest that He points

to a final consummation wherein He shall appear with great power and glory. A personal return is here distinctly foretold, mysterious as it may be. No less plainly are we taught to look for a gathering together of His faithful servants (*v.* 27, cf. 1st Thess. iv. 14-17). The signs that correspond to the sprouting of a fig-tree are not so readily defined. The diffusion of gospel truth among all nations is one of them. The tribulations, darkness, and general perturbation among the powers of the heavens, we cannot pronounce upon with any confidence. Enough to know that they form a part of the preparation for the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and therefore, whatever be their terrors, they are to be anticipated with hope and confidence by the servants of Christ.

The 30th verse has perplexed many. "This generation shall not pass . . ." No doubt it applies first to the fall of Jerusalem; but to what beyond? Some believe it to mean "the human race shall not pass"; others "the race of Israel." May the true interpretation not be *the Church*? The Church whose future founders sat around the Master as He spoke, the last development of His visible kingdom on earth, is the generation that shall not pass till the wonders of the second coming are complete.

VI. The Final Exhortation, vv. 32-37.—The natural anxiety of every disciple is to know when the signs foretold may be expected. But that, Jesus taught, was a thing hidden even from Himself in His state of humiliation, whatever His knowledge might be in the eternal counsels of the Godhead.

All we know is that the day and the hour will not come unheralded. Meanwhile the duty of the Church and of every member is plain: "Take ye heed, watch and pray" (*v.* 33). The Son of Man is as a man sojourning in another country (*v.* 34, R.V.), and yet He is with His people alway. He hath given to every man his work and He will aid every man in its performance. He will also demand a reckoning of how that work is

done. What need of such earnest watchfulness when there shall be signs to mark His second coming? The answer is that if men suffer themselves to grow careless the signs will pass all unheeded; the day of Christ will arrive and careless souls will be startled by finding the crisis upon them. However far off we may imagine the second advent to be, no wise and loyal disciple will cease from watching. There is no time allotted by Christ for spiritual slumber, and there is continual danger of falling into it.

LESSON XXVI

WEDNESDAY IN PASSION WEEK—JESUS RESTS AT BETHANY—HIS ENEMIES CONSPIRE—A WOMAN'S DEVOTION AND A TRAITOR'S GUILT

Chap. xiv. 1-11

I. The Conspirators, *vv.* 1-2.—After the exhausting controversy in the temple, Jesus spent the following day in quiet at Bethany. Meanwhile the chief priests and scribes were in eager consultation. Their attempts had as yet come to nothing. Moreover, Jesus still commanded a large measure of popular favour. To arrest Him in the temple as He taught would create a tumult and bring them into trouble with the Romans. Yet something must be done, else their influence and authority would be in danger. If only they could seize Him in a quiet way and have Him put to death! To those conspirators thus darkly plotting, Satan sent an unexpected ally. To understand how this came about St. Mark now takes us back to the Saturday evening before the triumphal ride to Jerusalem.

II. The Anointing at Bethany, *vv.* 3-9.—This beautiful incident is distinct from one recorded by St. Luke (*vii.* 37-50). Who Simon the leper was we do

not know. Probably one of those healed by Jesus and now kept humble for life by the unhappy title that clung to him. He was evidently an intimate friend of Lazarus and his sisters. On this occasion he had made a supper in honour of the Master, and the risen Lazarus sat among the guests, while Martha helped to serve (John xii. 2).

1. *A WOMAN'S ACT OF DEVOTION*, v. 3.—The woman's name is not given here. It would not interest St. Mark's Gentile readers; but we learn from St. John (xii. 3) that she was none other than Mary, the sister of Lazarus. We see her standing by, full of grateful love to Him who had restored joy to her heart and home. She holds a small vase of alabaster stone—so called from Alabastron in Egypt, where such vessels were made—filled with costly perfume; and, coming behind the couch where Jesus reclined at meat, she breaks the jar and pours its contents on His head. It was a beautiful act of spontaneous devotion—impulsive, lavish, self-forgetful.

2. *THE MURMURERS*, vv. 4-5.—Such a deed could never pass without some unkind remark. Again St. Mark gives no names, but St. John tells us that it was Judas Iscariot who raised the murmurs that presently were heard. Concerning this man St. Mark says but little. But to comprehend this passage we must draw upon the details given elsewhere concerning him. Judas was a hard, shrewd man of business, a native of Kerieth in Judæa; apparently the only apostle who was not a Galilæan. He had joined himself to the disciples of Jesus, not without a considerable repute for godliness, else he had never been made an apostle, but chiefly with an eye to personal advancement in Messiah's kingdom, and, above all, to the attainment of wealth. His turn for finance led him to be entrusted with the apostles' common purse, and in that charge he had not proved honest. "He was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John xii. 6). Sometime ago the Master had found him out (John vi. 70); but he still enjoyed a fair public reputation. For Judas to see

a costly vase of spikenard destroyed, when its price, 300 denarii, more than £10, might have gone to swell his gains, was intolerable.

He could not but cry out. Yet the protest must be veiled under a respectable plea. So he challenged the waste of substance that might have gone to relieve the poor, and his words seemed excellent good sense to the other disciples. Those honest men would have been glad to see Jesus receive the ointment if it had been for His benefit. But what struck their practical minds was the utter lack of any result to justify the sacrifice of so large a sum. How many suffering poor might not the price of that ointment have succoured! How unwarrantable the waste committed! So those good men thought in the dullness of their spiritual understanding. And so we find many worthy persons reasoning to-day when they witness an act of devotion a little beyond them. David's pouring out of the precious water from the well of Bethlehem (1 Chron. xi. 18) and Mary's broken flask of ointment are two actions hard to get over by a certain order of mind.

3. *THE LORD'S APPRECIATION*, vv. 6-9.—Promptly He reproved Judas and the murmurers, and at once stamped Mary's deed with His highest favour. She had wrought—

(a) *A Good Work*, a deed of whole-hearted devotion.

(b) *An Appropriate Work*.—We cannot suppose that Mary had in view the Lord's approaching death. The reference to His burial is evidently the idea of Jesus Himself, spoken to show how this anointing was, in view of the circumstances, more suitable than Mary herself realised. No doubt the poor were with them, but they could relieve the poor at all times, *if they would*. To anoint the Jews' Messiah and the world's Redeemer was a deed that rose above such narrow criticism. Love like that of Mary is wiser than it knows, even viewed from the most common-sense standpoint.

(c) *A Memorable Work*.—Jesus in His most solemn and impressive manner enrolls Mary's deed among

the enduring memorials of His Church. Why this great honour? Because of the unalloyed love and reverence it contains. "She hath done what she could," she gave of her best, with free hand and eager, grateful heart. The wealth of love in it surpassed every other consideration. Such actions are not to be judged by narrow economical laws. The cause of Christ never yet suffered from "waste" like that of Mary. Anything that fosters her spirit will bear a rich return in manifold services according to the Master's will.

III. The Murmurer turned Traitor, *vv.* 10, 11.
 —We see now why St. Mark has placed the foregoing narrative here. Judas, smarting under the Master's reproof and brooding over the lost three hundred pence, had spent three days in gloomy reflection. The mention by Jesus of His burial as a near event had struck him with a shock and brought to mind the frequent reference to impending sufferings and death that Jesus had lately made, unheeded. The attacks upon Him in the temple, and the growing hostility of the chiefs of the nation, now formed in Judas the conviction that his dream of Messiah's kingdom of wealth and splendour was vain. In the rage of disappointed avarice, the man was tempted of Satan. The base idea struck him that if his hopes were to come to naught, he might at least secure something out of the wreck. By this time no doubt he heard of the rulers' desire to capture Jesus without public tumult; and so we see avarice and baffled ambition lead to dark treachery. Judas bargained to give up His Lord for thirty silver shekels, about eighty-five shillings. Of all the crimes committed in compassing the death of Jesus Christ, none was so black as this. Once a man of sufficient character and gifts to be chosen by Jesus Christ for the apostleship, we see Judas, by indulging the love of money, fall step by step to his present level, and doomed to fall farther still. Surely in this busy age, with religion and money so intermingled that wealth wins men as much influence in the Church as in Society, the fall of Judas carries its warning.

LESSON XXVII

THURSDAY IN PASSION WEEK—THE LORD'S LAST
PASSEOVER AND THE FIRST LORD'S SUPPER

Chap. xiv. 12-25

"THE first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover," *v.* 12.

The Paschal Feast was the first and the most notable of the Jewish national ceremonies. It commemorated the deliverance of the chosen people from the bondage of Egypt, the beginning of their national life; and the Church of Christ has ever realised that it pointed forward to the deliverance wrought for all mankind by the atoning sacrifice on Calvary.

Bible scholars dispute as to the day of the month on which Jesus and the apostles now kept this feast. Was it on the 14th of the month Nisan or Abib, the usual day for killing the Paschal lamb? or was it on the 13th, so that the Lord's death on the day following coincided with those sacrifices?

St. Mark, like St. Matthew and St. Luke, assumes the first view; but St. John implies the second. The question is a difficult one and cannot be argued here. Enough for us to remember that in either case we can truly say that on that Thursday evening, or, more properly, on the evening that began the Friday, Jesus kept the Passover with His disciples; just as we can affirm that whether He died on the 14th—the Passover day—or on the day following, assuredly "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. v. 7). In St. Mark's terse and graphic narrative we note—

I. The Preparation of the Feast, *vv.* 12-16.—According to the law of Moses (Ex. xii. 3) the lamb had been selected on the 10th of the month. In reply to the disciples' enquiry where the Master desired the

table to be spread, the form of direction here given them is significant. Our Lord names neither person nor dwelling. "A man bearing a pitcher of water" (v. 13) might be conspicuous in a land where women generally performed that office. The question "Where is the guest-chamber?" reads more correctly, "Where is *my* guest-chamber." It seems as if Jesus, aware of treachery, and "with desire" having desired "to eat this Passover" (Luke xxii. 15), had previously arranged matters with a householder in Jerusalem and was able now to instruct His messengers Peter and John (Luke xxii. 8) without affording the traitor a clue.

"And they made ready the Passover," v. 16. The ceremonial of the Passover at this time was long and elaborate. It included the drinking in fellowship of four cups of wine, the last two named the cup of blessing and the cup of joy. Besides the lamb, a dish of bitter herbs was eaten, along with unleavened cakes and a sauce of mixed fruits called the charosheth. At several points in the festival a solemn thanksgiving was offered. The head of the family, in reply to a question by the youngest person present, recounted the incidents of the great deliverance from Egypt. Near the beginning of the feast the first part of the Hallel or song of praise was chanted (Psalms cxiii., cxiv.), and the remainder at the close (cxv.-cxviii.). To make ready for those ceremonies involved arranging the upper chamber for the thirteen guests; killing the lamb in the temple before the priests, and providing the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the charosheth, and the wine.

In the various services here rendered, viz. the providential guidance by the water-carrier, the obedience of the two apostles, and the hearty response of the householder, whether prearranged or not, we see how the Lord can use men's several gifts and actions for the fulfilment of His high ends.

II. The Announcement of the Traitor, vv. 17-21.—It was evening: Jesus and the twelve had journeyed once more from Bethany and were now re-

clining round the holy table. The solemn ceremonial seems to have proceeded as usual, broken only by the great lesson in humility recorded by St. John, when Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John xiii. 2-12). But just after the first part of the Hallel had been sung, the Lord startled the company by the announcement "Verily I say unto you, one of you which eateth with me shall betray me" (v. 18). We should have expected to hear indignant protests. Instead, there are grieved questionings, one after another exclaiming "Is it I?" (v. 19). Those men's love for their Master, their experience of how invariably His sayings came to pass, and, doubtless, a sense of inward weakness and of dark possibilities of evil, filled them with distress and consternation. In such a case it is good to hear men say "Is it I?" rather than "Is it he?" Self distrust instead of suspicion is a mark of grace. We have here a hint of the self-inspection that all Christ's servants ought to practise before the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's reply in verse 20 was an emphatic repetition of the charge in verse 18. It was openly made. He specified no one. All were dipping with Him in the dish. St. Mark omits the sign recorded by St. John whereby Judas was privately indicated, and also the hypocritical question of Judas and the Lord's answer (Matt. xxvi. 25). He centres our attention on the shocked dismay of the apostles and then goes on to recount the Lord's wondrous utterance of pathos and majesty in verse 21. "The Son of Man indeed goeth," His would be a voluntary sacrifice. But, further, "as it is written of Him." He claims for His death the high significance of fulfilled prophecy (Ps. xxii., Isa. liii.). Finally, He pronounces the doom of the traitor. "Good were it for that man if he had never been born." Such a character as his turns the blessing of existence into a curse. Nowhere does Jesus assume a more lofty attitude than in these sad words. We see that the value of the sacrifice and the guilt of the traitor are both due to the Divine greatness of the sufferer.

III. **The Lord's Supper**, *vv.* 22-25. — The Paschal lamb had once more been eaten. The redemption from bondage fifteen hundred years ago had been commemorated, and the greater redemption now close at hand was for the last time prefigured. Before He dispensed the cup of blessing, we see Jesus once more take the unleavened bread, and, having blessed it, distribute to the eleven faithful apostles, with the words "Take eat, this is my body." Then taking the cup in due order He said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many." There are many and divers views of the meaning and efficacy of the Lord's Supper. In this brief account of St. Mark we note the following :—

1. *A PERSONAL MEMORIAL*.—The command, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke xxii. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25) is not recorded here. From the character of the ordinance it is plainly implied. After celebrating a great national festival Jesus supersedes it by a memorial of Himself. The claim to personal pre-eminence thus made is intelligible only because of its truth. Question the grounds of it and we have a case of presumptuous arrogance inconceivable in the character of Jesus Christ.

2. *THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS DEATH*.—"This is my body. This is my blood of the new testament (lit. covenant), which is shed for many" (*v.* 24). Jesus proclaims Himself the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The body shown forth was a body broken. The blood of the new covenant symbolised by the wine possesses an expiatory virtue, whereof the blood sprinkled by Moses in the wilderness was but a type (Ex. xxiv. 8). Without shedding of blood there is no remission. But all previous blood sacrifices were only the shadows of this one now set forth, and derived from it whatever atoning efficacy they possessed (*cf.* Heb. ix.).

3. *A MEMORIAL OF UNITY*.—The Passover was a family reunion. It was also a national bond in which the precious traditions of the Hebrew race were every

year revived and the people's sense of kindred strengthened. And the Lord's Supper was ordained to fill the place of the Paschal feast in the wider fellowship of the Church. It is a spiritual reunion of the disciples of Jesus, wherein the sacrifice that redeemed them and the precious interest they share in the Master's cause and kingdom are called to mind for the furtherance of their fellowship and goodwill.

4. *THE BREAD OF LIFE.*—The command to eat and drink the holy symbols signified the nourishment of the soul through fellowship with Him of whom they testify. The Paschal lamb eaten on the night "to be much observed" (Ex. xii. 42) sustained the chosen people in their toilsome journey. So are souls sustained by feeding upon Christ. And there is no more effective means of so doing than by devout participation in the Lord's Supper.

5. *THE SECOND COMING.*—Jesus looked to the future, to the day and hour that no man knoweth, and He declared that the visible fellowship to be interrupted by His departure would be resumed under changed conditions. The fruit of the vine to be drunk "new in the kingdom of God" does not signify new wine, but wine partaken of in a new order of things. The words point to the marriage supper of the Lamb, where they, who on earth were partakers of His sufferings, shall share His glory, and eat and drink of the blessings prepared for the faithful (Luke xiv. 15; Rev. xix. 9).

LESSON XXVIII

THE APOSTLES' WEAKNESS FORETOLD—PETER'S PROTESTATION—THE AGONY AT GETHSEMANE

Chap. xiv. 26-42

I. A Prophecy and a Protest, vv. 26-31.—In this passage the 26th verse should be placed after the 31st (Luke xxii. 39; John xiv. 31). The Lord's Supper was now over. But, before they left the table, Jesus, quoting Zechariah xiii. 7, declared that the prophet's prediction was soon to be fulfilled. That night they would all be made to stumble because of Him (v. 27, R.V.). Through the wrath of man but under the providence of God, the Shepherd was about to be smitten and the sheep scattered. It is significant that the same chapter of prophecy tells of "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech. xiii. 1). In the smitten Shepherd they would find the open fountain. But those trials would soon pass; dispersion would be followed by reunion. "After that I am risen I will go before you into Galilee" (v. 28).

THE PROTESTATION OF PETER, v. 29.—Still, as before, the apostles failed to comprehend "what the rising from the dead should mean" (ix. 10). The saying "one of you shall betray me," had caused dismay and doubt (v. 19). But after the evening of loving fellowship this more sweeping statement aroused indignation. Simon Peter, with characteristic impulsiveness, protests, "Although all shall be caused to stumble yet will not I," (v. 29 R.V.). And the Lord's emphatic rejoinder "This day (the day begun at the recent sunset), even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice" (v. 30), only caused a more vehement contradiction in which the others joined (v. 31). In the glow of feeling

now kindled such protests were natural, although the self-distrust formerly shown had been still the wiser course.

And now the second part of the Hallel was sung (Psalms cxv.-cxviii.). And Jesus led the little band of apostles forth from the upper chamber to the Mount of Olives. St. Mark omits the words of tender wisdom and the wonderful Prayer of Intercession—the true “Lord’s Prayer”—uttered during this walk (John xiv.-xvii.).

II. **Gethsemane**, vv. 32-42.—This word only means the “oil press.” Yet no name is of more mournful associations. That olive garden on the slope of the Mount was a frequent resort of Jesus for quiet and prayer, and Judas knew it (John xviii. 1, 2). The scene here described reminds us of the Temptation in the wilderness (i. 12, 13), and the Transfiguration on Hermon (ix. 2-10). In the first Jesus proved His might against the great adversary, in preparation for His ministry on earth. In the second He enjoyed a bright hour of heavenly fellowship in view of the trying days at hand; and now, on the eve of the last and darkest hour of all, we see Him nerve Himself for the ordeal He was about to encounter. In this record we note—

I. **THE MASTER’S AGONY**.—Sore amazed and very heavy, He leaves eight apostles behind, and, with Peter, James, and John, goes into the deeper shades of the garden. Yet even that will not do. His soul is “exceeding sorrowful unto death” (v. 34). The Son of Man must be alone with His God and Father, the only One able to comprehend His sorrow. So, withdrawing from the three to a more secluded spot, still within sight and hearing, He casts Himself on the ground and prays in mortal anguish of soul that the “cup” might pass from Him. The prayer is addressed to the Father in unfaltering faith. The Aramaic “Abba,” St. Mark here translates for his readers. The submission of will is absolute (v. 36). Yet the pain is none the less intense. It is an agony, a wrestling, and carried on “with strong crying and tears” (Ileb. v. 7).

2. *ITS MYSTERY*.—Wherefore this awful suffering? What was the cup He so earnestly desired to be taken away, if it were possible? He clearly meant His approaching death. He was thinking of the cup of the new covenant in His blood (v. 24). It was the cup which, in the hidden counsels of God, the Father had put into His hand that He might drink it. But why such pain in the prospect of death? He was to leave the world, the cruel, inhospitable, wicked world, and return to the Father. That thought could only have brought joy. Was it the persecution, the scourging, the mockery, and the cross, that He dreaded? The anticipation of these formed a trial and a sharp one. But we cannot believe Jesus Christ to have been so affected by the thought of martyrdom. Did He possess less fortitude than Stephen, or Peter, or Paul, or the great cloud of witnesses who confronted cruel deaths without flinching? Impossible. Was it then a struggle with the powers of evil? Was His old adversary of the wilderness making a final attempt to divert Him from His purpose by pain and terror, since he had failed to allure Him by craft? No doubt the adversary was there; but no such grievous effects had his direct antagonism power to produce. It was not thus that Jesus encountered the Evil one at the beginning of his career, and ever since He had treated him as a beaten foe. There is a mystery of suffering in this agony that we cannot fathom. The burden and the horror of the world's sin and guilt are pressing upon the pure soul of Jesus as never before. The black cloud is falling lower and lower. He begins to realise the awful experience that culminated at Calvary in the cry "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (xv. 34). Further than this we cannot see and we dare not speculate.

3. *ITS ISSUE*.—The agony of suffering was an agony of prayer, and the issue was victory. Not only did His faith and submission remain perfect, but they prevailed over pain. The cup was not taken away; but He received strength to drink it. The calm self-possession with which our Lord faced the traitor, the

judgment hall, and the cross, may be traced to the victory won at Gethsemane. Such is the invariable result of persevering, faithful prayer. It never fails to receive an answer. To the earnest wrestler victory is assured. Our Father either removes the burden or gives strength to bear it.

4. *THE DISCIPLES' WEAKNESS*, vv. 37-42.—Jesus had desired the three chosen apostles to watch with Him; not for safety, but for sympathy. He knew that His time was at hand, but He sought the comfort of knowing that friends were near Him, grieving for His pain. Yet three times He came after a crisis in His agony, and each time He found them asleep. The reaction from the excitement of the upper chamber was too much for them. They did not realise the present situation. They saw their Master in trouble, and heard His broken words of anguish, which are recorded here. But they did not understand their import. So they suffered drowsiness to overcome them, although by watching they could have soothed and given relief.

5. *THE LORD'S ADMONITION*.—(a) A word of gentle reproach, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest thou not watch one hour?" (v. 37). Is this the fruit of all thy protestations? (b) A word of earnest counsel to all, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (v. 38). He sets His own welfare aside. He is again the minister, not the ministered to. If they would not watch for His sake, He bids them watch and pray for their own, for thus only could they withstand the trials that would be their portion, as in infinitely greater measure they were His. All men are tempted, however pure or vigilant or devout; but he only enters into temptation who by neglect of watching and prayer suffers temptation to enter into him. (c) A word of gentle irony, "Sleep on now, and take your rest" (v. 41). That opportunity was past. It mattered not now, on His account, whether they slept or waked. But then followed a clear word of command, "Rise up, let us go" (v. 42). Another trial,

another opportunity, had come. Let them prepare for it. A great preacher—Robertson of Brighton,—in a famous discourse, points out that in every life there is an irreparable past of lost opportunities and neglected duties ; but there is also an available future, and the wise man will show his regret for the one, not by idle repining, but by earnest endeavour to turn the other to good account.

LESSON XXIX

THE BETRAYAL AND DESERTION—JESUS BEFORE THE COUNCIL—PETER'S DENIAL

Chap. xiv. 43-72

IN St. Mark's graphic narrative, the events of the gospel tragedy now march in rapid succession.

I. The Betrayal and Desertion, vv. 43-52. In this incident we note—

1. THE TRAITOR'S PART, vv. 43-45.—Judas in disappointed avarice had given place to the devil, and now drowned reflection and stifled conscience by the most shameful hypocrisy. Whilst the three chosen friends slumbered, "one of the twelve" had been active. There is no doubt that Judas had induced the chief priests and scribes to seize this opportunity of capturing Jesus, instead of waiting until the feast day was past. Now he appeared leading "a multitude" (v. 43), hastily got together from the temple guards and high priests' slaves, reinforced by a detachment from the Roman garrison. With characteristic shrewdness he had arranged a sign whereby he might without raising an alarm, or perhaps even without revealing his treachery, let the soldiers recognise their victim. He even added the gratuitous counsel "take Him and lead Him away safely" (v. 44). His conduct in the garden, when,

hailing Jesus as "Master ! master !" he kissed Him—literally, kissed Him much—needs no comment. No wonder *the kiss of Judas* has become a byword for treachery under the guise of affection.

2. *THE SAVIOUR'S PART*, vv. 48, 49.—St. Mark relates only one of the several sayings recorded by the other evangelists. But it is enough to show how complete was the victory won by Jesus through prayer. He faces His captors calmly with the bearing of a king. St. John mentions that at first, on hearing Him declare Himself, they fell backward to the ground (John xviii. 6). Certainly, of all that gathering, Jesus, the victim and prisoner, was the most self-possessed. He points out to His assailants that the display of force is needless. Then, with quiet majesty, He appropriates the prophecies of a suffering Messiah (v. 49). He knows that the high purposes of God are being accomplished ; so there is no resistance or attempted flight. No physical violence could quench the truth He taught or hinder His great work of redemption. And what was true of Jesus then, remains in its measure true for His followers. Amid the wrath of man and the opposition of evil the Scriptures are fulfilled.

3. *THE APOSTLES' PART*, vv. 47-50.—At first they seem to have stood aghast and bewildered. Then "one of them," who St. John tells us was Peter, struck a blow in his own impetuous way, but only succeeded in wounding a slave of the high priest. It was a brave act because of the risk incurred by it, but foolish withal, and wrong in principle. Jesus Christ and His cause can never be preserved by such means. Finally, on seeing the Master submit to His captors and led away, panic seized the apostles, and, for all their recent protestations, "they all forsook Him and fled." We cannot wonder at their weakness ; nor dare we cast a stone. After all, although they loved their Lord sincerely, those men did not yet comprehend His character and mission. In His capture they saw the wreck of their high hopes for Messiah's kingdom.

While Jesus prayed they had slumbered. Now Jesus stands firm and they take to flight. Their experience may teach us humility and diligence in prayer. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Prov. xxviii. 26).

We read of a young man (v. 51) who, on being caught, left the sheet that covered him in the soldiers' hands, and fled "naked," literally without an outer garment. Some maintain him to have been Mark himself; but nothing is known, and in such a matter conjecture is idle. This incident is just one of the details that Peter in his old age would love to relate and Mark to record.

II. Jesus before the Council, vv. 53-65—St. Mark introduces us at once into the presence of Caiaphas the high priest for that year. He omits a preliminary interview with Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, a former high priest, whom the Roman State had deposed from office, but who exercised great influence among the Jews. The Sanhedrin had been called together informally at dead of night. And we see Jesus led in, bound and bearing marks of violence. Simon Peter, recovered from panic, is also there along with John, through whose acquaintance with the high priest they had been allowed to come within the palace gate. If Peter was rash in venturing thither, it was love, not idle curiosity, that brought him. In this record of the Jewish trial of Jesus, we note—

1. THE FUTILE CHARGES, vv. 55-60.—The council had already resolved upon His death (vv. 1, 2). Justice was out of the question, but some show of judicial procedure had to be made. The law required a capital charge, supported by two witnesses; but, though many false witnesses appeared with various accusations, nothing sufficient even for that tribunal could be drawn from them. So little was there to urge against Jesus that some at last recalled a saying of His, uttered near the beginning of His career, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 19). That parable of His death and resurrection they attempted

to twist into a threat, (*v.* 58). A charge of hostility towards the temple was serious enough, but this also broke down. And through all the travesty of justice the prisoner Himself stood silent. Not even the high priest's urgent questions could move Him to speak (*v.* 60). He would not defend Himself in a prejudged case.

2. *THE MESSIAH'S CLAIMS*, *vv.* 61, 62.—Caiaphas knew well how Jesus had presented Himself to the nation as their Messiah, and what enthusiasm He had aroused among the people. It might be unwise for the Sanhedrin to attack such claims. Therefore he had sought to condemn Jesus on other grounds, but in vain. Now there was nothing for it but to revert to the dangerous subject. Solemnly he adjures the prisoner, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?"—that is, the Son of *God*. To that challenge the Lord's answer was ready, "I am" (*v.* 62). Then, looking beyond the cross and the sepulchre, He foretold His second appearing as the glorified Son of man. With this avowal Jesus crowns and interprets His teaching of the last three years. He stands confessed in His two distinct natures and one person. We prize those words now as among the most precious in Holy Scripture.

3. *THE CHARGE OF BLASPHEMY*, *vv.* 63, 64.—The Lord's claim was unmistakable. To the chiefs of the chosen nation the crisis had come for which they were so ill-prepared. It was not only that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. That might be only a political pretension, dangerous no doubt, yet nothing more. But to claim to be the Son of God with power was, for a mere man, an act of blasphemy. So serious a claim made before a grave council demanded at least careful examination. But they were there not to judge, but to condemn. "What need we any further witnesses?" (*v.* 63) was the cry of a triumphant accuser, sure now of his prey. The rending of robes (2 Kings xviii. 37) in token of horror at profane assumption was an outward form that hardly hid the hypocrisy. The unanimous condemnation, "worthy of death" (*v.* 64,

R.V. ; Lev. xxiv. 15, 16), only gave effect by vote to the eager purpose of the meeting. And then followed a scene on which it is not good to dwell. The Sanhedrin could pronounce sentence of death. But only the Roman authorities could execute it. It was still only three o'clock. Hours must elapse before they could approach the Chief Magistrate. In the interval we see that fierce band adding to their shame by heaping outrage and contumely upon the unresisting Saviour. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that "some" members of council took part in the violence, and then left Him in the hands of guards and slaves to make sport with till morning broke.

III. Peter's Denial, *vv.* 66-72.—Yet another warning against self-confidence was to be furnished on that night. We read that while the Master was evil entreated by His judges, Peter remained in the porch of the palace warming himself at the fire. Thrice was he challenged as a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, once as he stood with the firelight shining upon him, once as he skulked in the darkness of the outer court, and again as, thrown off his guard, he betrayed himself by his rough northern speech. And three times Peter's courage gave way, until at last we hear him who last evening declared himself ready to be faithful unto death, now protesting with angry oaths "I know not this man." It is a sad spectacle, but not altogether unwholesome. Peter's weakness was the inevitable fruit of his foolish confidence. He had blundered into it; but his heart remained sound. One look of significance from the Master (Luke xxii. 61),—one stab of memory as for the second time the cock crew,—and the warm-hearted apostle rushes out into the darkness weeping bitterly. Peter learned his own weakness by a sharp experience. But the discipline never shook his adoring love towards the Lord. Peter the presumptuous apostle is now Peter the penitent, and on the way to become the Peter of Pentecost, the intrepid champion and pillar of the infant Church.

LESSON XXX

JESUS BEFORE PILATE—THE SCOURGING AND
MOCKERY

Chap. xv. 1-20

OF the four accounts of the first Good Friday that of St. Mark is the shortest. Important as would be a combined narrative of all the incidents of that momentous day, drawn from the several records, we must confine ourselves to essential points set forth in the passage before us, and allude to the other gospels only in so far as needful for its exposition.

I. Jesus brought to Pilate, v. 1.—In a humane spirit and as a means of securing fair treatment, the Jewish law prohibited the Sanhedrin from trying criminal cases by night. Therefore after daybreak “straightway” the council held a second and more formal meeting, where they confirmed their former verdict against Jesus, and proceeded in a body to the Roman governor with a demand that the death sentence be carried out.

Pontius Pilate had governed Judæa since the year 26 A.D. He was subordinate to the Governor of Syria, of which territory Judæa was a province; but within his own jurisdiction he wielded powers of life and death. Personally, though not without some sense of righteousness, Pilate was weak and self-indulgent, and he had in the course of his administration rendered himself obnoxious by acts of extreme severity (Luke xiii. 1, 2).

For the Jews he felt all the scorn of a conqueror; yet he shrank from offending them, lest complaints should be made against him to the Emperor Tiberius. His character and conduct could not stand criticism. At the present time Pilate, with his wife, Claudia Procula, had come up from their headquarters at Cæsarea, on the

coast, to keep order at Jerusalem during the feast. Probably he held his court in the tower of Antonia overlooking the temple. And there, because the Jews dreaded to run the risk of ceremonial uncleanness by entering a Gentile house that might be unpurged of leaven, he administered justice in the open air. The tessellated pavement (Gabbatha) was laid in front of the palace, and upon it was set the judgment seat, before which Jesus now stood bound, and surrounded by the chief priests and members of the Jewish council intent on His destruction.

II. Jesus Accused, Examined, and Pronounced Guiltless, *vv. 2-5.*

1. *THE ACCUSATION.*—There is here no hint of the blasphemy for which the Council had already condemned Jesus. The chief priests knew that the Roman magistrate would dismiss that plea at once. The nature of the charge now advanced may be gathered from Pilate's question on hearing it, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" (*v. 2*). St. Luke, however, informs us more fully that it was threefold: (*a*) "Perverting the nation"; (*b*) "Forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar"; (*c*) "Saying that he himself was Christ, a king" (Luke xxiii. 2). If they could only make those points good, their object would be attained.

2. *THE EXAMINATION.*—Pilate at once fixed upon the third charge as involving the others. "Art thou the King of the Jews"? The question was put with scorn, yet in all gravity, as became a judge; and accordingly it received a direct reply, "Thou sayest it," a common form of assent, meaning "Even so." Yet, as St. John tells us (xviii. 36-38), a little further inquiry showed Pilate that the kingship thus frankly professed was, from a ruler's point of view, quite harmless. The shrewd Roman must have wondered at the sudden zeal of the chief priests against political disaffection. Now he partly understood the case. There was here no disaffection. This man was no wild fomentor of sedition, or second Judas of Galilee to trouble the tax

collectors, but a man of peace, a visionary who claimed a kingdom "not of this world," and to be maintained not by the sword but by "the truth."

3. *THE ACQUITTAL; A WEAK JUDGE.* — Pilate could "find no fault in this man" (Luke xxiii. 4). He was also deeply impressed by His bearing as He stood in silent dignity amid the revilings of the priests (*v.* 3). But though Pilate acquitted Jesus of guilt, he had not the firmness at once to order His release. A weak desire to humour the Jewish temper, now getting restless as the crowd around the judgment seat increased, tempted him to dally with a plain duty, and the inevitable result followed in the growth of difficulties in discharging it. An attempt to throw the responsibility upon Herod (described by St. Luke, xxiii. 6-12) proved futile. Pilate's past misdeeds had arisen in judgment to hinder him from following the right.

III. *Barabbas preferred to Jesus, vv. 6-15.* — The custom of releasing a prisoner in honour of the Passover feast seems to have been a new one, probably introduced by the Roman authorities. But the privilege had existed long enough to be now called for by the populace (*v.* 8), and Pilate hoped to find in it a way of escape from his dilemma. He saw that the priests had condemned Jesus out of spite and envy, and not from regard either for Roman authority or for good order. Therefore he turned from them to the people. He had in custody Barabbas, a noted leader of insurrection, a robber and murderer. Surely if he gave the multitude a choice between this ruffian and the meek prophet of Nazareth there could be no doubt of the result. But Pilate reckoned without the chief priests' cunning and the people's uncertain temper. The former doubtless represented Barabbas as a patriot who had resisted the Gentile even unto blood, and Jesus as an impostor who had deceived them all. The latter were disappointed that their recent hopes of a conquering Messiah had come to naught. They could take no account of the truth Jesus had taught, the deeds of mercy He had done,

and the holy character He had manifested amongst them. For the greater part of that excited crowd, Barabbas was now the more attractive Messiah of the two. And so they gave their voice in his favour. Pilate had erred once in not setting Jesus at liberty; a second time in subjecting Him to the people's choice beside the criminal Barabbas; and now again he erred still more deeply in asking, "What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?" (v. 12). The manner of the question was scornful; the asking it at all showed in the ruler an unworthy fear, and the result was inevitable. In such a crowd, disappointment soon becomes wrath and may be easily fanned to fury. And so, many of those who but six days ago cried "Hosanna to the son of David," now yelled in chorus, "Crucify him," and shut their ears against expostulation. They denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto them (Acts iii. 14). In this scene the old saying, "the voice of the people is the voice of God," received its crowning refutation.

The unscrupulous malice of the chief priests, the fickleness and turbulence of the people, and the selfish weakness of Pilate, culminate here in the supreme crime of the world's history. We see the Divine Son of Man, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, scourged by the orders of a magistrate who had just declared Him guiltless, and then handed over to the soldiery to be tormented and put to death. And yet, by the good hand of Him who causeth the wrath of man to praise Him, that crime was the means of carrying out the world's redemption.

IV. Jesus in the Prætorium, vv. 16-20.—The members of Sanhedrin and their slaves had mocked Jesus as Messiah (xiv. 65). Now the Roman soldiers mocked Him as King. In the Prætorium or common hall of the castle the whole corps were summoned to share the cruel sport. We see a purple robe—some old military cloak—thrown over Him, a platted crown of thorns pressed upon His head, a reed thrust into His

hand. With jeers they hail Him "King of the Jews!" and, infuriated by the patient endurance of their victim, they snatch the reed from Him and beat the thorns into His brow, the while spitting upon Him and doing mock reverence on bended knee. Then, sated with inhumanity, the savage crew proceed to restore His own garments, soon to be the perquisite of His executioners, and lead Him forth to die.

Shocking as these outrages appear when we think of Him who endured them, let us remember that those heathen knew not what they did. They used Jesus as they would have treated any one so placed in their power. Their guilt was small compared with that of the Jewish rabble who shouted for His blood—very small in comparison with that of the chief priests and scribes, and how little does it weigh against the guilt of many who to-day name the name of Christ, enjoy the blessings of Christian civilisation, and yet refuse Him allegiance and follow only their own selfish ways (Luke xii. 47, 48).

LESSON XXXI

THE CRUCIFIXION AND BURIAL

Chap. xv. 21-42

WE have seen throughout St. Mark's gospel that the deeds of our Lord receive more prominence than His sayings. And, now that we come to the culmination of His ministry of Redemption, the same rule holds good. Only now the strenuous worker has become the patient sufferer. His solemn words uttered on the way to Calvary (Luke xxiii. 27-31), and even the seven memorable sayings from the cross, are, with one exception, omitted. Attention is fixed upon the great central fact that Jesus suffered and died.

I. The Burden of the Cross, v. 21.—The *via dolorosa* (Sorrowful Way), now pointed out to travellers as the road by which our Lord was led to Calvary, is of uncertain authority. We only know that it must have led beyond the walls of the city (Numbers xv. 35, Hebrews xiii. 12). According to the Roman custom the heavy beams of the cross were laid upon the shoulders of the criminal, to be borne to the place of execution; and when Jesus, exhausted by suffering, sank under the burden, the soldiers laid hold of a passer-by and compelled him to relieve their victim. This man was Simon, a member of the Jewish colony at Cyrene in Northern Africa, and now visiting Jerusalem for the Feast. He was afterwards known to the Church as the father of two disciples, Alexander and Rufus,—probably the Rufus named by St. Paul (Romans xvi. 13). In the task of that morning, Simon, little as he imagined it, had an honourable distinction thrust upon him. We may believe that the service thus rendered proved the beginning of a life-long cross-bearing as a follower of Jesus.

II. At the Place of Death, vv. 22-24.—Golgotha, the place of a skull, also named Calvary from the Latin equivalent, seems to have been a small eminence on the northern side of the city, and to have owed its name to its peculiar shape. There is no ground for supposing that the skulls of crucified persons lay there unburied. On the procession arriving at the spot, a gleam of mercy lightens the cruel picture. In accordance with a custom, said to be due to some humane women of Jerusalem, the doomed sufferers were offered a stupefying draught of spiced wine. But Jesus refused it. So, unrelieved, He was stripped and nailed to the Cross. Then the accursed tree was raised up bearing its sacred load (John iii. 14), and the executioners sat down to divide His garments, casting lots for the “vesture” or inner robe that rending would have spoiled (Psalm xxii. 18).

III. The First Hours on the Cross, vv. 25-32.—St. Mark alone mentions that the crucifixion took place at the third hour—about 9 a.m. Till noon Jesus endured

manifold ignominy. In the narrative before us we see reproach heaped upon reproach. Above His head was hung a tablet with a scoffing indictment in three languages, "The King of the Jews." On either side of Him hung a robber, probably of the followers of Barabbas. The words of verse 28 are omitted from many versions of the gospel. They are none the less an appropriate quotation in the light of their fulfilment (Isa. liii. 12). Passers-by jeered and wagged their heads, reiterating the lie that He had blasphemed the temple (*v.* 29). The chief priests and scribes had their own venomous jest, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save" (*v.* 31). They had too often been put to confusion by His works of mercy to lose this opportunity for a sneer. The very ruffians dying beside Him joined in the general reviling, until one of them, touched and awed by His demeanour, turned to penitence and faith (Luke xxiii. 42). In all those reproaches there was the challenge, expressed or implied, "If Thou be the Messiah, save Thyself." We hear as it were an echo of the old temptation, to put forth supernatural power for the relief of present need (Matthew iv. 3). The scoffing words of the chief priests expressed a sober truth. To save others He must sacrifice Himself. Never, to the eye of faith, does Jesus appear more distinctly the Messiah and King than in those hours of agony, amid the contempt of the souls for whom He bore it.

IV. Darkness, Desolation, and Death, *vv.* 33-38.—From noon till three o'clock the sunlight was obscured. It was no natural eclipse. It would seem as if the sufferings of Christ borne during those three hours of gloom were too profound and sacred for mortal eye to witness. In Scripture, as in Nature, a veil has been cast over them. Then, at the hour of the evening sacrifice (3 P.M.) the cloud lifted and the silence was broken with the awful cry of loneliness, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," which St. Mark interprets from the Hebrew for his readers (*v.* 34). The Saviour adopts with infinitely deeper meaning the

Psalmist's words of woe (Ps. xxii. 1). How it was that He felt desolate in that supreme moment of obedience to the will of God, we cannot understand. We can only point to the teaching of Holy Scripture (Isaiah liii. 6, 11, 12; 2 Cor. v. 21; 1 Peter ii. 24), and believe that in those hours of gloom the dark cloud of the world's sin and guilt shut out the light of His Father's countenance. The malice of the foes of Jesus now reached a climax. Unmoved by the sight of suffering, the scribes greeted His cry of anguish with an attempt to play upon the words. "Behold, He calleth Elias," was their scoff. One of the soldiers—touched, perhaps, with a sense of pity—dipped a sponge in the vessel of "vinegar," or sour wine, set for their use, and put it to His lips with the remark, "Let alone, let us see whether Elias will come to take Him down" (v. 36). Jesus received the vinegar, then in tones of triumph He "cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost" (v. 37). There is little doubt that the loud cry here mentioned was the solemn "It is finished," recorded by St. John (xix. 30), and followed immediately by the prayer, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). Some scientific authorities have affirmed that the death of Jesus was due to rupture of the heart caused by mental agony. Other commentators maintain that He parted with life from no necessity of exhausted nature, but by a deliberate act of will. It is better to rest contented with the words of Scripture, "He gave up the ghost," and refrain from further speculation. The Good Shepherd had given His life for the sheep. No man had taken it from Him, but He laid it down of Himself (John x. 11, 18). Yet this did not involve deliberate self-destruction. The words were fulfilled when, of His own accord, Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame.

V. Various Testimonies.

1. *THE RENT VEIL*, v. 38.—At that hour the priests in the temple were startled by the sudden rending asunder of the thick curtain that screened the Holy of Holies, and behind which the High Priest entered alone

once a year with the blood of atonement (Lev. xvi. 17, 34). That rent veil was a sign that the world's atoning sacrifice had been offered once for all. By "the new and living way" revealed in Christianity the holiest fellowship was now to be enjoyed by every willing soul (Heb. x. 19, 20).

2. *THE CENTURION'S CONFESSION*, *v.* 39.—This Roman soldier was superintending the execution in the course of duty. But the demeanour of Jesus so impressed him, that on beholding the darkness and the manner of the Lord's departure, we hear him, awe-stricken, exclaim, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (*v.* 39). The words, as spoken, may not amount to a Christian profession, but they were the beginning of light. Who can tell to what they may have led?

3. *THE DEVOUT WOMEN*, *vv.* 40, 41.—Among the friends of the Master were several women who viewed the scene afar off. Mary Magdalene was there, from whom Jesus had cast seven demons (Luke viii. 2), and Mary the wife of Alphæus, and Salome the mother of James and John. We wonder why the saddest mourner of all is not named. Probably at an early hour St. John had removed the Lord's mother from the scene (John xix. 27). The aged Simeon's prophecy had found fulfilment. The sword had pierced through Mary's own soul also (Luke ii. 34, 35).

VI. *The Burial*, *vv.* 42-47.—The scene at the cross had awakened reverence in the centurion. It now inspired with courage Joseph of Arimathæa (probably Ramah of Benjamin). He was a member of Sanhedrin, wealthy and religious, and a secret disciple of Jesus. He had not consented to the verdict against the Lord. Probably he had not attended the trial. But now Joseph set fear aside and went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus (*v.* 43). It was needful that the burial should take place before sunset, when the Sabbath began (Deut. xxi. 23). After due inquiry Pilate gave the needed authority. Then we see Joseph, the "honourable counsellor," purchase fine linen, and, heedless of ceremonial defilement, repair to Golgotha. With

the help of Nicodemus, another "coward spirit" made brave (John xix. 39), the sacred body is taken down, reverently enwrapped in linen with lavish store of spices, and laid in a new sepulchre hewn in a rocky garden adjoining the place of execution. In presence of the mourning women a weighty stone, prepared for the purpose, was rolled to the mouth of the grave. Thus the humiliation of Jesus was complete,—His body in the tomb, having suffered the fate of sinful humanity, His apostles scattered in despair, His near and dear ones only anxious to honour His remains by acts of reverence. No trace do we see of a hope that the grave would soon give up its dead. The world's ransom was paid, and, notwithstanding all that the law and the prophets had testified, and that Jesus Himself had taught, not one soul on earth seems to have apprehended the momentous fact.

LESSON XXXII

THE LORD'S RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

Chap. xvi

"When the Sabbath was past," *v. 1.*—How had that great Sabbath day been spent? The body of Jesus rested in the tomb. His soul was "in Paradise," the abode of the blessed dead (Luke xxiii. 43). Further we learn from St. Peter that He was "quickened in the spirit, by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter, iii. 18, 19). A mysterious statement, apparently meaning that Jesus on that day proclaimed to the souls of those long departed that the work of redemption had been accomplished.

The chief priests and scribes were triumphant, but ill at ease withal. For they remembered the Lord's prediction that He would rise again, and, on the plea that the disciples might try to remove His body, they had a

military guard posted at the tomb (Matt. xxvii. 66). The disciples were deeply depressed. The prediction just referred to, while remembered by the Lord's enemies, seems to have been forgotten by His friends and followers. Their hopes and ambitions were buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathæa. We can but faintly imagine what gloomy thoughts and forebodings weighed upon them in those trying hours.

But love survived faith and hope. For now the Sabbath was past; and after sunset the three devoted women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Alphæus, and Salome the wife of Zebedee, hastened to provide themselves with sweet spices that they might add their tribute of affection to that which they had seen paid to the Master at his burial (xv. 47). In the passage before us we note—

I. The Visit to the Tomb, v. 2.—The period of our Lord's rest in the grave, commonly represented as three days, was from Friday evening till early on Sunday morning—about thirty-six hours. The Jewish reckoning counted any part of a day as one, so "on the first day of the week, when the sun was risen" (v. 2, R.V.), we see those three women set forth on their errand of love. So intent were they and so wrapt in sorrow, that not till they drew near to the sepulchre did they remember the great stone they had seen rolled against its entrance (v. 3). Still they went on, and, as often happens in Christian service, the difficulty disappeared at their approach. "Looking up" (v. 4, R.V.) at the rocky hill-side in which the sepulchre was hewn, they perceived that the stone had already been rolled away "for it was very great," and therefore conspicuous. St. Mark omits various details given by St. Matthew, such as the earthquake, the angel of the Lord seated on the stone that he had displaced, and the panic-stricken guards (Matt. xxviii. 2-4). He simply mentions that when the women looked into the tomb, they were "amazed" to see "a young man sitting on the right side clothed in a long white garment" (v. 5).

II. The Angel's Announcement, vv. 6, 7.—We observe—

1. *ITS STUPENDOUS IMPORTANCE, v. 6.*—"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth (lit., the Nazarene), which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here." Those few simple words proclaimed one of the all-important facts of history. They declared Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of God with power (Rom. i. 4), His claims vindicated, His mission accomplished, His atoning death accepted as the ransom for mankind (Rom. iv. 25, 1 Peter i. 3). They proclaimed death and the grave vanquished by a man, the representative of the human race (1 Cor. xv. 20-26); and "life and incorruption brought to light" (2 Tim. i. 10 R.V.). Without that revelation the Gospel would have been no good tidings of great joy for mortal man (1 Cor. xv. 14-19).

2. *ITS GRACIOUS CHARACTER.*—The celestial being who first announced the Saviour's birth (Luke ii. 10) was now sent to declare His resurrection. In both cases he began by reassuring timid souls; in both he announced a sign to assist faith (v. 7; cf. Luke ii. 12). The same graciousness appears in the message to the apostles (v. 7; comp. xiv. 28); and Simon Peter is specially named, in token that his tears and penitence have been accepted.

3. *ITS OVERPOWERING EFFECT, v. 8.*—The women fled from the spot in a trance of bewilderment, fear, and rapture (see Matt. xxviii. 8). "Trembling and amazement seized them," and till they reached their friends they held speech with no one. Thus even by those who loved Him best, the tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, though declared by an angel from heaven, and confirmed by the sight of an empty tomb, were received with very mingled emotions. So slow is the growth of faith in the most kindly soil.

III. The Risen Lord and the Incredulous Apostles, vv. 9-14.—At this point there is a manifest break in St. Mark's narrative. Many eminent authorities hold that it closes with the eighth verse; and they point

to the fact that the remaining verses are omitted in the two oldest manuscripts. We cannot weigh the various critical arguments here. Enough to observe that even on the supposition that those last twelve verses were an early supplement, their narrative is substantiated by the other gospels.

"Now when He was risen early on the first day of the week" (*v.* 9, R. V.). The change of the day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week—the Lord's day—is a remarkable testimony to the fact of the Resurrection. Such an observance is not likely to have been founded on a delusion. Of the ten recorded appearances of our risen Lord in the forty days preceding the Ascension, this passage relates three, and in each of them pointed reference is made to the disciples' slowness to believe. They are as follows:—

1. *TO MARY MAGDALENE, v. 9.*—This Mary is sometimes most unjustly identified with the penitent who anointed the Saviour's feet (Luke vii. 37, 38). The fact that Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene casts no reflection upon her personal character. This appearance seems to be the same as that recorded more fully by St. John (xx. 14-17).

2. *TO TWO DISCIPLES, vv. 12, 13.*—This is evidently the incident related more fully in connection with the walk to Emmaus (Luke xxiv. 13-35).

3. *TO THE ELEVEN AS THEY SAT AT MEAT, v. 14.*—Probably this appearance occurred on the same day as the foregoing. St. Luke records how they were terrified, "and supposed that they had seen a spirit" and how Jesus reassured them (*a*) by the sight of His hands and feet; (*b*) by eating in their presence; (*c*) by expounding the Scriptures (Luke xxiv. 36-48). It may well have been that in course of those instructions He upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart (*v.* 14). In the light of this passage it is impossible to maintain that the belief of the apostles in the Resurrection was a fond dream easily accepted by them. On the contrary, they received the first tidings with distrust, and were

convinced only by visible proof. The thoroughness of that conviction, and therefore the value of the evidence that produced it, are well attested by the history of the early Church. In all their preaching the resurrection held a chief place, as if the truth so hardly gained could not be made too prominent (Acts ii. 32 ; iii. 26 ; iv. 33 ; v. 30 ; x. 40, 41 ; xiii. 30, 31, etc.).

IV. **The Last Charge and the Ascension**, *vv.* 15 20.—“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation” (R.V.). This charge may well have been given on the occasion just referred to. St. Luke alludes to it (xxiv. 47, 48), and St. John records words that were probably uttered at the same time (xx. 21-23). In that case it anticipates the final and more elaborate “marching orders” of the Church recorded by St. Matthew (xxviii. 18-20). The disciples’ mission was no longer merely to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. x. 5, 6). All mankind must hear the gospel, and, where it was accepted, all creation would be blessed by it. The ordinance of baptism is here attached to the grace of faith (*v.* 16) ; but the lack of baptism is not declared to preclude salvation.

Not the want of baptism, but the wilful or careless neglect of it constitutes a sin. The phrase “shall be damned” does not teach irrevocable perdition ; but that as long as the gospel remedy is refused the unbelieving soul is left, by its own act, under the condemnation whence there is no other way of escape. The “signs” that would follow belief were the various gifts of the Spirit bestowed on and after Pentecost. Those gifts, with the wonders wrought by the first Christian teachers, belonged to the apostolic age and formed a part of the plan of Providence for the first diffusion of gospel truth (Acts ii. 1-21 ; iii. 7 ; x. 46 ; xxviii. 5, 8 ; James v. 14, 15).

The last words of this gospel, whether in the original or not, hold up to the eye of faith a glorious picture.

1. *THE MASTER ASCENDED*, *v.* 19.—His mission to earth fulfilled, His last counsels given, His sacrifice

offered and accepted, His victory over sin and death achieved, He has carried His human personality to the right hand of God, and there He abides, glorified in body and soul, the first fruits of the Church of His redeemed.

2. *THE CHURCH AT WORK*, v. 20.—Not on the Ascension day, but in due season, endued with power (Luke xxiv. 49), "they went forth and preached everywhere," and their Lord reminded them continually of His glorified presence above by His spiritual presence below "working with them and confirming the word with signs following." Before St. Mark wrote his gospel, the truth had been proclaimed from Babylon to Spain. Since then it has spread more widely, and is still spreading. Still Christ's disciples, according to the measure of their faithfulness, "go forth and preach everywhere." Still the Lord worketh with them through the Spirit, and the word is confirmed by signs following. The sight of men and nations turning from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God; the sight of liberty and peace instead of former bondage and strife; the sight of renewed life and energy and progress wherever a pure gospel is preached,—are "signs following" as real, and as confirmatory of its divine power and virtue, as any physical miracle that was ever wrought by the apostles.

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